SLAVERY, ABOLITIONISM AND EMPIRE IN INDIA, 1772–1843

Andrea Major

LIVERPOOL STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL SLAVERY, 6

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Abbreviations

AGG	Agent to the Governor-General
BC	India Office Records, British Library, London, Board's Collection
BFASS	British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society
BIS	British India Society
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
CMS	[Anglican] Church Missionary Society
EIC	East India Company
HC Deb.	Hansard, House of Commons Debates
HL Deb.	Hansard, House of Lords Debates
LMS	London Missionary Society
PP	Parliamentary Papers
SMS	Scottish Missionary Society
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts
VOC	Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodists Missionary Society

Glossary

ammah	Indian wet nurse
anna	unit of currency worth one-sixteenth of a rupee
ayah	children's maid
banjarras	nomadic tribal group from north-west India, sometimes referred to as gypsies
bazeegurs	community of wandering entertainers, sometimes conflated with gypsies
beli	to burn, applied to concubines and slaves who burned on their master's funeral pyre
bibi	literally, 'Miss' in Urdu, it was a respectful form of address when added to a woman's name, but could also mean a native mistress of a European man in India
burda furosh	supposed slave-dealing caste
charak-puja	hook-swinging ceremony
chermar	so-called 'slave caste' in South India
chowkidar	night watchman
dacoits	bandits/robbers
dasa	'original' non-Indo European inhabitants of India, the term implies a servant or slave
davri	female slave or attendant in a Rajput *zenana*
devidasi	literally, servant/slave of god, a temple dancer
Dharmasastras	prescriptive Sanskrit religious texts dealing primarily with legal and religious duty
diwani	administrative authority
fakir	Muslim ascetic, usually sufi, and often itinerant
Foujdari Adalat	chief criminal court of appeal in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies
ghat	series of steps leading down to a lake or river
Jaggernath/ Juggernath	Hindu deity, whose festival in Puri, Orissa, involved his image being drawn around the temple compound on a large temple car that reputedly crushed devotees under its wheels

kistmutgar	butler
kotha	matriarchal establishments of courtesans
kshatriya	warrior or kingly *varna*
kutni	female pimp, procurer or go-between
Mapilla	a Kerala Muslim community
Moffusil	the countryside
mohur	a gold coin, worth fifteen silver rupees
mu'tah	form of fixed-term marriage used in Shi'a Islam
munshi	Urdu language teacher or secretary used by East India Company officials
nautch	popular style of Indian dance, performed by *nautch* girls
nawab	title given to a Muslim ruler or nobleman
Nizamat Adalat	chief criminal court of appeal in the Bengal Presidency
pagoda	gold or half-gold coin minted in South India
pandit	Hindu scholar, teacher and religious expert (almost always also a Brahmin)
paswan	concubine
punkah	fan
rupee	basic unit of currency in India
ryot	peasant
sati	literally 'virtuous woman', more commonly used to describe a woman who burns on her husband's funeral pyre. Anglicised as 'suttee', it was also used by the British for the practice of widow-immolation itself
Smritis	a body of Hindu religious texts
subedar	highest native rank in the East India Company army, equivalent to Lieutenant
sudra	labourers and manual workers, lowest of the four *varnas*, or castes
syce	groom
tawaif	high-class courtesan
thuggee/thagi/thug	supposed criminal cult of highway robbers and murderers
zamindars	large local landholders/rural magnates
zenana	the inner areas of the house where female family members lived

Some Prominent Figures in the British Parliament, the Abolitionist Movement and the East India Company

Parliament

Thomas Babington Macaulay, 1st Baron Macaulay
Son of leading abolitionist Zachary Macaulay, British poet, historian and Whig politician. After a period as Secretary to the Board of Control, he went to India in 1834, where he was a member of the Supreme Council and a leading member of the Law Commission.

Henry Peter Brougham, 1st Baron Brougham and Vaux
Whig MP, liberal reformer and abolitionist, he was Lord Chancellor between 1830 and 1834, and active in the House of Lords thereafter.

James Silk Buckingham
Author, journalist and founder of the *Calcutta Journal*, lived in India for several years before he was expelled by the EIC in 1823 for his outspoken criticism of their administration. MP for Sheffield, 1832–37.

Edmund Burke
Whig MP for Wendover, orator, political theorist and philosopher, known for, among other things, his role in leading the prosecution in the impeachment of Warren Hastings.

Thomas Fowell Buxton
MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis and leading Parliamentary abolitionist, he took over at the movement's helm when Wilberforce retired in 1825.

Henry Dundas
1st Viscount Melville, Tory MP for Midlothian, he spoke against the abolition of the slave trade and he held various positions under Pitt the Younger, including First Lord of the Admiralty and Secretary of State for War. He was later impeached for misappropriation of public money from the Admiralty, but was acquitted.

Charles Grant, 1st Baron Glenelg
Son of EI director and abolitionist Charles Grant, he succeeded his father as MP for Inverness-shire and held various government positions. Initially a Tory, as a Canningite he aligned with the Whigs over issues such as electoral reform.

Edward Harbord, 3rd Baron Suffield
MP for Yarmouth and Shaftesbury in the House of Commons and later a leading parliamentary abolitionist in the House of Lords.

Robert Inglis
MP for Oxford University from 1829 to 1854.

Edward Law, 1st Earl of Ellenborough
Tory MP and four times President of the Board of Control, he was also Governor-General of India, 1842–44.

Joseph Marryat
West India merchant and MP for Horsham, he spoke often on colonial and maritime matters in favour of West India interests, campaigning in particular against the abolition of the slave-trade and the equalisation of sugar duties.

Daniel O'Connell
Firebrand Irish political leader who campaigned for Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Act of Union. MP for County Clare from 1830.

Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne
Whig MP who served as Home Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord President of the Council. He was sympathetic to reform movements such as Catholic emancipation and abolitionism.

William Wilberforce
Independent MP and leading parliamentary abolitionist credited for his role in bringing about the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. An evangelical Christian, he was also a strong supporter of the missionary enterprise and of social reform movements in Britain, although he has been accused of emphasising moral over material improvement for the poor.

Abolitionists and Evangelicals

James Cropper
Quaker, abolitionist and East India trader, Cropper argued for the removal of the sugar duties and the development of the East India sugar trade (in which he himself was involved) as a means of combating and undercutting the West Indian slave system.

William Lloyd Garrison
Prominent radical American abolitionist, journalist, and social reformer, he was the editor of the anti-slavery newspaper *The Liberator*, and a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Zachary Macaulay
A leading Clapham Sect abolitionist, in his youth he had worked as an assistant manager on a Jamaica sugar plantation, but after returning to Britain he under went a conversion to evangelical Christianity and joined the anti-slavery movement.

Joseph Pease
Abolitionist and businessman, he became the first Quaker Member of Parliament in 1832, where he represented South Durham and supported the Whig government. He was involved in the formation of the BIS and the Peace Society.

Wendell Phillips
American lawyer, abolitionist, orator and advocate for the rights of Native Americans.

George Thompson
Abolitionist and later MP for Tower Hamlets, he is known for his anti-slavery oratory and activism on both side of the Atlantic. He was also a founding member of the short-lived British India Society.

West Indian Interests and Others

William Cobbett
Journalist and pamphleteer, he initially supported the Tories, but later became more radical, advocating strongly for parliamentary reform. His *Political Register* (which was referred to as 'two-penny trash' by critics) had a mainly 'working-class' readership. Though not particularly supportive of the West Indian slave system, Cobbett was critical of reform movements that focused on distant colonies, rather than the plight of the poor at home. He was also a ferocious critic of the EIC, which he saw as corrupt and exploitative.

John Gladstone
West India trader and father of William E. Gladstone, he was embroiled in a lively debate with James Cropper over the sugar duties and was also an early exponent of Indian indentured labour in the Caribbean.

George Saintsbury
West India apologist and member of the West Indian Association, he wrote the book *East Indian Slavery*, in which he compared the position of slaves and peasants in India unfavourably to the 'pampered Negro slave'.

Missionaries and Chaplains in India

William Adam
Baptist (later Unitarian) missionary in India, 1818–38, he later took up a post as Professor of Oriental Literature at Harvard. With connections to both British and American abolitionism, he was involved in BFASS and the formation of BIS, as well penning letters and speeches on East Indian slavery.

Claudius Buchanan
Church of England minister, EIC chaplain and vice-principal of Fort William College, he was a sometimes controversial supporter of missions and an advocate of native education.

William Carey
Founding member of the Baptist Missionary Society and first of the famous 'Serampore trio' of missionaries based at that Danish enclave in India. Through his work he became a renowned linguist who translated the Bible into various Indian languages and even taught at Fort William College.

James Pegg
Baptist missionary stationed at Cuttack in Orissa. On his return to Britain he published numerous tracts arguing for British intervention on a range of Hindu religious ills, including sati, infanticide, *ghaut* murders and slavery, and criticising EIC toleration of 'idolatry'.

William Tennant
EIC chaplain and Minister of the Forces in India, he wrote the book *Indian Recreations*, which was published in 1803.

William Ward
One of the 'Serampore trio' of Baptist missionaries, he is best known for his extensive writing about Indian society, religion and customs, and for his fund-raising tours through Britain and America.

East India Company Officials

Thomas Baber
EIC official, he was District Judge in Tellicherry, 1808–16. Fervently against slavery, he advocated for the amelioration of the condition of the so-called 'slave castes', as well as coming into direct conflict with Murdoch Brown over his use of slaves on his plantation.

William Bentick
Governor-General of India, 1828–35. An evangelical and a utilitarian, Bentinck is perhaps best known for the social reforms implemented during his tenure, including the prohibition of sati.

Thomas Brooke
Political agent at Bareilly and agent to the Governor-General for Ceded Provinces.

Francis Buchanan
Scottish physician who initially worked as a surgeon to Governor-General Wellesley in Calcutta, but was later entrusted with carrying out surveys of different parts of the EIC domains. His survey of South India resulted in *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar* (1807). Founder of Calcutta Alipore Zoo and Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Gardens, he is also famous for his contributions as a geographer, zoologist and botanist.

Robert Clive
'Clive of India', the British officer whose success at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 is often cited as the start of EIC territorial control in India. In 1765 he accepted the grant of the Diwani of Bengal from the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II.

Henry Colebrooke
EIC official and Orientalist scholar and President of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Charles Cornwallis, 1st Marquess Cornwallis
Governor-General of India, 1786–93. Cornwallis is known for the many administrative, judicial and revenue reforms he implemented, including, most famously, the Permanent Settlement, as well as measures against slave-trafficking.

Jonathan Duncan
Governor of Bombay, 1795–1811.

Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 1st Earl of Minto
Governor-General of India, 1807–13.

James Forbes
Scottish artist and author, he worked as a writer for the EIC in India between 1765 and 1784 and produced a vast collection of sketches and notes on Indian life, wildlife, flora and architecture, as well as his *Oriental Memoirs*, which he wrote after returning to Britain.

Charles Grant
EIC official in India, 1767–90. While there he both rose in the ranks of the EIC and underwent a conversion to evangelical Christianity. On his return to Britain he became MP for Inverness-shire and Chairman of the EIC. He was closely associated with the Clapham Sect, abolitionism and the missionary movement.

Robert Grant
EIC officer and brother of Charles Grant.

Nathaniel Brassey Halhed
EIC official, Orientalist scholar and philologist, he is best known for his legal compilation *A Code of Gentoo Laws.*

Warren Hastings
First Governor-General of India, 1774–85. Hastings was impeached by Parliament for corruption in 1787, but cleared in 1795.

William Jones
EIC Judge in the Supreme Court of Calcutta, linguist, Orientalist scholar and founder of the Asiatic Society.

George Lawrence
Soldier and administrator in the EIC, he held various high-ranking positions, including political agent for Punjab and Rajputana. He was the brother of Henry Lawrence, who died at the siege of Lucknow in 1857.

Charles T. Metcalfe, 1st Baron Metcalfe
EIC political agent, held various posts in the 1820s and 1830s, including resident at Delhi, envoy to Sikh ruler Ranajit Singh, Governor of Agra and Acting Governor-General. After India, he went on to become Governor of Jamaica and Governor-General of Canada.

James Mill
Utilitarian political theorist and economist, in 1818 he published his influential history of British India. After this he was offered a post at East India House and rose through the ranks of the EIC, despite never visiting India.

John Malcolm
Scottish soldier and EIC political agent, he held various posts before becoming Governor of Bombay in 1827–30.

Thomas Munro
EIC army officer and administrator, he was Governor of Madras, 1820–27, during which time he instituted a number of reforms, including the *ryotwari* revenue system.

Charles Oakley
Governor of Madras, 1792–94.

David Ochterlony
British Resident at Delhi, famous for his Mughal-Indian lifestyle and *zenana* of wives and concubines.

Francis Edward Rawdon-Hastings, Earl of Moira
Governor-General of India, 1813–23.

J. Richardson
EIC magistrate for Bundlekund, he wrote an extensive letter to the government of India in 1808 calling for the suppression of slavery in EIC territories.

Archibald Seton
EIC Resident at Delhi.

William Sleeman
EIC soldier and administrator best known for his campaign against *thuggee*.

Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington
Most famous, of course, for his role in the Napoleonic Wars and later for two stints as Tory Prime Minister, Wellesley cut his military teeth in India in campaigns against Mysore and the Marathas in the 1790s.

Matthew Yates
EIC agent at Ingeram, he repeatedly came into conflict with the French authorities at Yanam over their involvement with slave-trafficking.

Some Other Europeans in India

Murdoch Brown
Scottish overseer and later owner of the Randaterra plantation at Anjarakandy, which he worked with low-caste slaves.

Lewis De Mars
French agent at Yanam (Yanoan) involved in slave-trafficking in that area.

E. L. Eilbraert
Factor at Pulicat for the Dutch VOC.

Eliza Fay
Wife of barrister Anthony Fay until 1781 when they separated, she left extensive letters detailing her travels and her time in late-eighteenth-century India.

Peter Horrebow
Danish captain sailing under EIC colours who was convicted of slave-trafficking between Bengal and Ceylon in 1789.

Claude Martin
Officer in the French and later the British EIC army in India. He rose to the position of Major General, before taking on the role of Superintendent of the Arsenal for the Nawab of Awadh at Lucknow. A collector, connoisseur and architect, he adopted various aspects of an elite Indian lifestyle, including a number of mistresses, some of whom had been purchased.

Andrew Perry
Briton accused of slave-trafficking off the Madras coast in 1790.

Pierre Sonnerat
French representative at Yanam (Yanoan), he came into conflict with EIC representatives over his supposed involvement in slave-trafficking, but is better known for his activities as a naturalist and explorer.

Some Indian Rulers and the Dates of their Reigns

Mughal Emperors (styled 'Kings of Delhi' by the British in the early nineteenth century)
Shah Alam II, 1759–1806
Akbar Shah II, 1806–37
Bahadur Shah Zafar, 1837–57

Nawabs of the Carnatic (Arcot)
Ghulam Hussaini Umdat-Ul-Umara, 1795–1801
Azim-ud-Daula, 1801–19
Azam Jah, 1819–25

Maratha Rulers
Shivaji, seventeenth-century warlord and founder of the Maratha polity
Baji Rao II, Peshwa 1796–1818

Mysore
Hyder Ali, 1761–82
Tipu Sultan, 1782–99

Gwalior
Daulatrao Scindia, 1794–1827
Jankojirao II Scindia, 1827–43

Awadh
Muhammad Ali Shah, 1814–27
Abul-Mansur Qutb-ud-din Sulaiman Jah, 1827–37
Amjad Ali Shah, 1842–47
Wajid Ali Shah, 1847–56

Kotah
Zalim Singh, 1771–1819
Kishore Singhji II, 1819–27
Ram Singhji II, 1827–66

Kunjpura
Nawab Bahadur Jung Khan, ruler of Kunjpura
Gholam Mohamed Khan, advisor to the Nawab of Kunjpura

Introduction

I

Other Slaveries

Introduction

In June and July 1833, the Houses of Parliament met to discuss the renewal of the East India Company's (EIC) Charter,[1] the royal grant that allowed this joint stock company first to trade with, and later to rule, India (Fig. 1). Tucked away among sections that removed the Company's remaining trade monopolies, divested it of its commercial functions and transferred greater authority to the parliamentary Board of Control, was a clause stating that by 12 April 1837 'all rights over any person, by reason of that person being in a state of slavery, shall cease'. Sponsored by Charles Grant (the younger) and Thomas Babington Macaulay, two men from prominent political families closely connected with both Clapham Sect abolitionism and East Indian trade, this clause was raised in the House of Commons at the same time that the more famous legislation dismantling the system of African chattel slavery in Britain's colonies was beginning its journey through parliament. As the EIC's Indian territories were specifically excluded from the Emancipation Bill, the Charter negotiations offered abolitionists a timely opportunity to put pressure on the East India Company to adopt similar reforms. The sudden attempt to end slavery in India in 1833 was unprecedented, however, for, although the existence of coercive labour conditions on the subcontinent had haunted the peripheries of abolitionist debate throughout the 1820s, Indian slavery had previously been conspicuous primarily by its absence from popular discourses of both colonial philanthropy and parliamentary reform. Little preparatory research into conditions in India was done in 1833, and the terms of the original clause, which allowed only four years to prepare and made no mention of financial recompense, were extremely radical. They certainly exceeded those of the Emancipation Bill, which provided both £20 million compensation for dispossessed West Indian planters and a gradual transition from slavery to free labour via the apprenticeship system.[2]

The EIC's governing body in London, the Court of Directors, was predictably alarmed at the implications of suddenly abolishing slavery in India, and their representatives in parliament gathered significant support in opposition to what they perceived to be a rash and ill-thought-out measure.

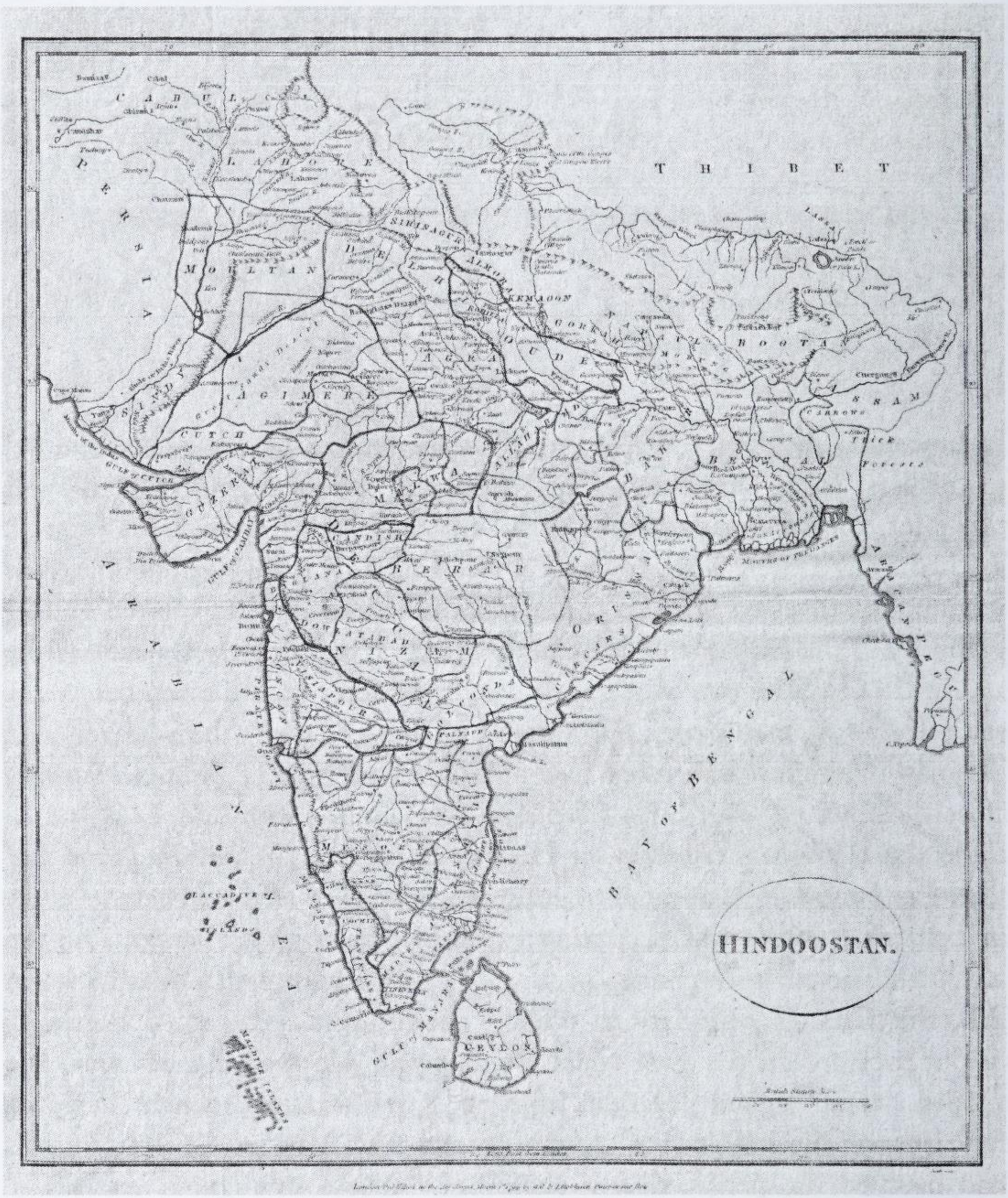

Figure 1. 'Hindoostan' in 1799.

After all, slavery in India, it was argued, was not like plantation slavery in the Caribbean and Americas and it would be dangerous to conflate the two. 'There are no two things in the world', Sir Robert Inglis, the member for Oxford University, reminded the Commons, 'more different from each other than East-Indian and West Indian-slavery.'[3] Unlike their West Indian counterpart, Indian forms of bondage were not considered particularly oppressive, and some EIC officials even argued that slavery served a useful social function by providing a potential means of subsistence for the destitute.[4] The Duke of Wellington claimed he had never known a single

instance of cruelty perpetrated by Indian proprietors towards their slaves, and most agreed that both domestic and agricultural slavery in India were generally mild.[5] Only in Malabar, where predial slavery existed in its worst form, were brutality and mistreatment admitted to be common, and even there some argued that examples of physical cruelty and social ostracism were the product of caste disabilities among the lower orders, rather than of slavery itself.[6]

Indian slavery was not only qualitatively different from that of the Western hemisphere, but it also contained myriad internal variations. As Indrani Chatterjee notes, the experience of African slavery in the New World led British observers to 'divide the world made by the slave-holders into neat little spheres—one where adult men laboured outdoors, and another where women and children laboured at tasks which could never be measured, and therefore remained undervalued as domestic labour.'[7] Both these forms of slavery existed in India and each raised its own specific issues. Agricultural slavery, which was primarily, though not exclusively, discussed in the context of South Indian labour relations, was represented as inextricably linked to 'the general institution of caste'—the rigid, hereditary social hierarchy which was thought to structure all aspects of Hindu life.[8] Unlike enslaved Africans, who had been 'brought within the memory of man from a distant country', India's agricultural slaves and their ancestors were thought to have existed in that state since time immemorial, having been born into immutable 'slave castes'.[9] This complicated matters, for, as the Marquess of Lansdown remarked, the 'dominion of law' could exercise 'but little influence' over an institution so intimately connected with the Hindu religion. The strong feelings that Hindus entertained regarding their caste status made interference with these social and ritual relationships appear difficult and dangerous, as well as potentially immoral. Lord Ellenborough, former President of the Board of Control and future Governor-General of India, for example, believed that it would be 'a violent outrage on the feelings and prejudices of the natives of India thus to abolish all castes there, and to say that slavery should no longer exist in that country'.[10]

Domestic slavery was an even more sensitive issue, because it was intimately connected to the household economies of the very Indian elite upon whose acquiescence the EIC relied for the maintenance of their rule. There was, the Duke of Wellington noted, hardly a family in India that was without domestic slaves, who were deemed essential for the running of a respectable establishment.[11] These slaves, though numerous, were apparently well treated, however; indeed, Lord Ellenborough maintained that those called domestic 'slaves' in India were not really slaves at all, 'being subject only to the mildest state of domestic servitude', while Mr Buckingham argued that domestic slaves were often practically members of the family.[12]

Under these circumstances any undue interference would not be viewed as a necessary humanitarian intervention, but rather as an unjustifiable infringement of the EIC's 'solemn engagement' to observe 'all the rights of masters of families, whether preserved by the Gentoo or Mahommedan laws'.[13] It would also involve a shocking violation of the Indian home, 'throw[ing] open the harems of the Mahommedans and the zenanahs of the natives to the inspection of the Company's officers' and leading to the most 'disastrous consequences'.[14] 'The natives generally', Mr Buckingham claimed, 'had a very high idea of the sanctity of their harems' and any interference would 'unite all classes against our Government."[15] Depriving the Indians of their slaves, the Duke of Wellington believed, would inevitably produce the greatest dissatisfaction, if not absolute insurrection.[16] Any precipitous attempts to abolish slavery in India, then, would amount to 'a wanton meddling with the prejudices of the natives', which would probably 'throw the whole country into a flame' and might even 'cost us our empire in India'.[17] It was 'insanity' to attempt to abolish slavery in India, Lord Ellenborough concluded, as it 'would lead most certainly to bloodshed in every part of India' and would 'shake the very foundation of our power in India, which would go to shake the confidence which every man there entertained in the justice and honour of the English Government'.[18]

Although he still considered the abolition of slavery in India a 'desired consummation', Charles Grant agreed that there was no need for hasty action on so delicate an issue and on 17 July tabled an amendment to the Charter Bill stating that

> the Governor-General in Council should be required forthwith to frame laws and regulations for the extinction of slavery, due regard being paid to the laws of marriage, and the rights and authorities of fathers and heads of families, and to report such laws and regulations to the Court of Directors before the 1st of January, 1835, and every succeeding year; and that the Court of Directors should within fourteen days of their receipt lay them before Parliament.[19]

This clause effectively made the method and timing of abolition a matter for the EIC authorities to decide. They, however, did not prove keen to expedite the process. In order to buy time before implementing an inconvenient social reform, Governor-General Lord William Bentinck decided to wait for the report of the newly formed Law Commission before agreeing to take any decisive steps, and then failed to instruct them on the subject. The result was a decade of inaction and prevarication.[20]

The arguments that resulted in the dilution of the anti-slavery clause in the EIC Charter reflected a specific set of assumptions about Indian slavery

that had developed over the preceding decades. These had been shaped by both colonial and metropolitan debates and provided a shared frame of reference for EIC members and abolitionists alike. There were dissenting voices, of course; Daniel O'Connell believed that giving the Governor-General control over reform 'would keep whole castes in slavery', while Lord Suffield regretted that the Bill had been thus watered down, using experiences in Ceylon to counter the idea that it would have excited any genuine fears. Unlike many others in the House, he thought the condition of slaves in the East Indies was 'in every respect quite as deplorable as that of the West-India slaves'.[21] Yet the leading parliamentary abolitionist of the day, Thomas Fowell Buxton, gave tacit assent to the dominant interpretation of benign Indian slavery by agreeing to support the amendment, declaring that although the legislature had the right to end slavery wherever it might exist within the British dominions, he was willing to place his confidence in the discretion of the Board of Control. With the pious wish 'that the time was not far distant, when the name of slave should be unknown in the British Empire', he allowed Indian slavery to disappear once more to the margins of political and humanitarian debate.[22] Thus, despite the anti-slavery movement's commitment to the principle of freedom, the terms in which Indian slavery was discussed in 1833, together with its relative absence from earlier abolitionist debates, suggest that not all slaveries were considered equal.

This book explores how slavery in India was erased within British public discourses on empire at the very moment when the horrors of the trans-atlantic trade were being seared onto the national conscience. It suggests that diverging ideas about the nature of slavery and freedom in different parts of the world were embedded not only in specific local contexts but also in wider debates about various colonial relationships in the wake of the American and French Revolutions. These relationships were being contested and negotiated by colonial officials, politicians, commercial interests, missionaries and abolitionists, both in Britain and in the colonies, throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As Sudipta Sen points out, 'questions of the freedom and unfreedom of subjects' were crucial within these debates, which were taking place at a time when 'the contradiction between liberty and servitude was becoming sharper'.[23] Debates on chattel slavery placed the issue of freedom at the centre of both colonial philanthropy and colonial politics, while expansion in India raised further questions about how 'racial others' who were not directly enslaved were to be governed. As a result, discourses of enslavement became an integral part of the 'general racial and ethnographic taxonomies that provided the ideological justification for conquering and assimilating diverse subject populations overseas'.[24] Within these debates, Indians were imagined simultaneously as an 'enslaved

other', whose servile characteristics justified colonial domination, and as autonomous peasant labourers who might provide a 'free-labour alternative' to West Indian slavery. These were often contradictory discourses, of course; the same men who lauded Indian free labour might also denounce caste as slavery, while simultaneously allowing the 'reality' of coerced labour in India to be elided within debates that were primarily concerned with the identity of the colonisers and their relationship to real and imagined slaveries in different parts of the empire. Debates about Indian slavery, then, were about the nature and limits of EIC rule in India, the relationship between India and Britain's other colonial possessions and the extent of Britain's moral and ideological responsibilities towards her colonial subjects, as much as they were about slavery itself.

In exploring how ideas about Indian slavery contributed to the construction of colonial identity in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain and India, this book follows Tony Ballantyne in imagining a 'webbed' construction of empire, in which various sites were linked together through a complex, dynamic and shifting mesh of networks.[25] It focuses specifically on British subjectivities and debates, but circumvents the binary, hierarchical relationship between centre and periphery by emphasising how ideas about Indian slavery emerged and interacted across the sites of empire. In particular, it challenges interpretations of the 'delegalisation' of Indian slavery as the result of unidirectional abolitionist pressure emanating from the metropole, instead focusing on how the EIC debates on slavery that took place in India before 1833 influenced metropolitan ideas, leading to specific political and ideological outcomes. By tracing the formulation and transformation of various assumptions about the nature of Indian slavery through the processes of local, colonial and imperial governance, and between the Indian locality, the colonial government, the home authorities and the British evangelical public sphere, it hopes to show how multi-directional and co-constitutive patterns of colonial knowledge formation influenced both evangelical identities and imperial policies. With this in mind, it does not attempt a narrative history of the 'delegalisation' of Indian slavery, nor a socio-economic study of Indian labour conditions, but rather focuses on how various encounters with, and debates about, slavery in India interacted with wider debates about the nature and meaning of empire.

The question of Indian slavery provides an anomalous chapter in the history of British abolitionism. Although the EIC formally prohibited the exportation of slaves from its territories long before the British abolition of the transatlantic trade in 1807, it was more reticent in dealing with 'indigenous' slave systems. Having determined that slavery was allowed by both Hindu and Muslim laws, the EIC preferred not to interfere with the domestic and agricultural labour arrangements of the Indian elite, except in

cases that impinged on colonial stability, or the rule of law. Thus, although individual EIC officials sometimes raised the issue of slavery in their official correspondence, discussing how it functioned in their districts, how they should adjudicate specific cases and what might be done for its amelioration/abolition, at a higher level the colonial state avoided authoritative intervention, often supporting slave-holders' property rights over the abolitionist aspirations of some of its officials.[26] This, as Indrani Chatterjee points out, remained the case even after slavery had supposedly been 'delegalised' in 1843.[27]

In Britain, the anti-slavery campaign led by William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and others gained mass support in the late eighteenth century, as increasing levels of public participation made the transatlantic slave trade one of the most controversial issues of the day. At the same time, unprecedented and rapid colonial expansion in South Asia made the 'India Question' the subject of both popular and political debate. The impeachment of Warren Hastings in the 1780s caused a sensation and debates about the nature of EIC rule continued throughout the early nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the emerging protestant missionary movement disseminated information about the benighted state of Britain's 'heathen' subjects in ever-increasing volumes. Thus, while abolitionist literature denounced the physical and psychological horrors of slavery, missionary propaganda exposed the 'inhuman customs' of the East. Members of both movements took part not only in political campaigns against the transatlantic slave trade, and later slavery itself, but also lobbied to open India to missionary activity in 1793 and 1813, and to prohibit *sati* (widow-burning) in 1829. Yet references to the existence of slavery in India remained conspicuous primarily by their absence from both abolitionist and missionary discourses throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century. When the issue was briefly raised in the 1820s, it was by West Indian planters, who were keen to undermine suggestions that East Indian produce provided an ethical, free-labour alternative to their own. Even when the issue was finally adopted by the newly formed British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) and British India Society (BIS) in the 1840s, it received a muted popular response compared to earlier campaigns. Impatient at the EIC's lack of progress, and concerned about a growing 'coolie trade' in Indian indentured migrants, which seemed to blur the boundaries between 'free' and 'unfree' labour, abolitionists mobilised to press for its eradication, and in 1843, under pressure from parliament, the EIC finally removed the legal sanction upholding the slave-holders' proprietary rights over their slaves. This did not amount to emancipation, however; merely 'delegalisation'. Slave-holding was not criminalised until 1862, and even then the colonial state remained ambivalent about the implementation of the supposed abolition.[28]

Studies of the relationship between metropolitan British political and evangelical movements, the EIC state and Indian slavery are scarce and usually focus on the impact of increased abolitionist pressure on EIC policy between 1833 and 1843.[29] Significant exceptions include Indrani Chatterjee's *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*, a dense, detailed and sophisticated study of how EIC policies impacted on domestic slavery in early nineteenth-century north India, and Richard B. Allen's recent article on EIC legislation against slave-trafficking in late eighteenth-century India.[30] Both represent important contributions to a currently under-populated field. Chatterjee's focus is largely subcontinental, however, and does not link events in India to the development of metropolitan British discourses.[31] Allen, on the other hand, suggests that the study of EIC attitudes to, and policy on, slavery in India can provide important new insights into the development of abolitionist sentiment in Britain. This study builds on these important works, by focusing on the interaction between colonial and metropolitan discourses on Indian slavery, and how this shaped the terms on which emancipation in other parts of the empire took place in 1833.

The 'blindness of anti-slavery leaders to East Indian slavery' prior to 1833 has prompted little inquiry within the standard histories of slavery and abolition. David Brion Davis, for example, explains it away in a single footnote as 'the result of scanty and unreliable information, and the peculiar nature of Indian slavery itself'.[32] This explanation is far from satisfactory. Compared to the wealth of material on West Indian slavery, information about Indian labour conditions was limited, and public knowledge about Indian slavery was confused and sometimes inaccurate during this period. Yet information was available in the public domain in the 1810s and 1820s, even if some of the usual organs that disseminated information about empire, such as missionary periodicals, failed systematically to review it. There were no fact-finding missions to India, like the one abolitionist Joseph Sturge undertook to the West Indies in 1837, but the EIC state did produce a voluminous collection of correspondence on the subject, dating back to 1772, which was published as Parliamentary Papers in 1828, 1834, 1837, 1841 and 1843. So extensive was the 1828 volume that during the Charter Bill debate MP Sir Robert Inglis lamented that no synthesis had been provided of the material it contained. The question, he maintained, was one of 'the highest interest to the people of England, and of the deepest and most vital importance to the general interest of the Indian population', yet not every Member, as he reminded the House, could spare time, 'even if inclination was not wanting', to wade through nearly 1,000 folio pages.[33]

Had the issue of slavery in India sparked his interest before it was raised on the floor of the House, Inglis might have found the information he required in more accessible forms. The publication of the 1828 Parliamentary

Papers had been publicised in the press, and the 'empirical' information they contained reviewed in publications like the *Asiatic Journal*, which carried a detailed commentary on them over several articles. They were also the main source for the only significant missionary work to include Indian slavery before 1833, Revd James Peggs's *India's Cries to British Humanity* (1830).[34] Its inclusion in this famous missionary tract suggests that the British evangelical public could access information about Indian slavery, yet unlike Peggs's other topics—*sati*, infanticide and idolatry—it was not widely discussed in the major missionary society publications, nor did it elicit much response from the abolitionist press.[35] Ironically, it was West Indian apologists, keen to undermine the 'moral' arguments for East Indian trade, who paid it most attention. Using EIC sources such as Francis Buchanan's *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar* (1807) and the Parliamentary Papers they publicly challenged abolitionist assumptions about 'free' Indian labour.[36] Information on Indian slavery was limited and sometimes unreliable, but to explain away the muted and ambivalent abolitionist response to it as simply the result of ignorance masks the discursive problems that exploitative Indian labour conditions posed for an anti-slavery discourse that struggled to reconcile slavery in the East with high profile abolitionist strategies that utilised India as a site of supposedly free labour.

If the Parliamentary Papers provided access to information on Indian slavery, they did so through the prism of a colonial discourse fashioned to meet the political and ideological imperatives of the EIC state. As one contemporary observer noted 'This big book treats the subject much in the same manner as the planter magistrates and senators of Jamaica might be expected to report on Negro slavery, if the House of Commons called on them to exhibit its nature.'[37] In a similar vein, Indrani Chatterjee suggests that they were less a repository of 'facts' about Indian labour conditions, than a record of a 'triangulated conversation' between EIC officials, the Presidency and Supreme Governments and the home authorities, around issues of colonial governance, slavery and abolition.[38] Some colonial officials did give detailed descriptions of labour conditions, as they perceived them, in their localities, but even these provide at best a problematic archive through which to attempt the reconstruction of Indian slavery. This study uses the Parliamentary Papers not to uncover the 'empirical reality' of Indian labour conditions, but for the insight they offer into how EIC officials in India interpreted slavery there and their own relationship to it, as rulers, administrators and, occasionally, reformers. These interpretations were not always consistent, varying between officials on the basis of their ideological position, or the immediate local imperatives of governance. The accounts of colonial officials in the field were often synthesised, simplified and sanitised as they progressed up through the EIC hierarchy; from local officials to

the Presidency Governments, the Court of Directors and eventually to parliament and sections of the British public sphere. Thus the 'triangulated' conversation they record offers a window onto more multi-dimensional global interactions that linked changing EIC ideas and policies on Indian slavery to metropolitan debates and to wider social, political and economic discourses about slavery, trade and empire, the nature of EIC rule in India and Britain's imperial identity. They are not read in this study for what they reveal about the intimate social functioning of slavery in India, which has been the focus of Chatterjee's extensive work, but rather what they tell us about the processes of colonial control, the formation of imperial and humanitarian ideologies and the shifting focus of empire from a West Indian slave system to an imagined East Indian 'free labour' one, as well as the various erasures and elisions that made these developments possible.

Brion Davis's second contention, that the 'peculiar' nature of Indian slavery itself accounts for its failure to impact on British abolitionist debates, raises some complex questions. Contemporary observers and more recent historians both assume a fundamental dissimilarity between East and West Indian slavery, based on the obvious and substantial differences in the way the institution functioned in the two locations. Indian forms of bondage did not easily conform to the defining features that characterised slavery in early nineteenth-century philanthropic discourse: the 'certain spaces (the ship, the plantation) and practices (especially the use of the whip and the treadmill) … [and] … the juxtaposition of particular racialised bodies (white enslavers/black enslaved)' that Lambert and Lester discuss as representing 'easily identifiable and denouncable metonyms for slavery'.[39] Without these key features, the application of the term 'slavery' to certain labour conditions could be contested, but their absence does not fully account for abolitionist disinterest. Indeed, uncritical overemphasis on the fundamental difference between East and West Indian slavery can obscure the useful insights that may be drawn if they are placed in the same analytical frame. EIC officials saw sufficient indications of 'unfreedom' to deploy the terminology of slavery, however unevenly and problematically, to the coercive labour relationships they encountered in India. The question, then, is not whether the various forms of bondage in India fit precisely with modern typologies of slavery, but what the differential designation of certain practices as slave or 'slave like' in colonial and evangelical discourses tell us about the processes of colonial knowledge formation.

It has been argued that surplus landless labour in India created an entirely different context for slavery than that which existed in the New World, where the entire slave system, complete with its features of extreme coercion, oppression and violence, was predicated on a critical shortage of free labour to work the available land.[40] Slavery in India, on the other hand,

has been characterised as connected to status, 'unproductive' domestic labour and agricultural subsistence, rather than with capitalist production. In light of this, some colonial observers argued that Indian slavery was relatively inoffensive—Governor-General Lord William Bentinck, for example, believed that it was 'Divested ... of all the cruel features which characterised the African trade'.[41] Though denied certain rights and freedoms, Indian slaves were thought to enjoy more security than free labourers, their position comparing favourably both to West Indian slaves and the average poverty-stricken Indian peasant. These assumptions about Indian slavery's benign nature influenced both contemporaries and subsequent historians, but they cannot be divorced from the discursive imperatives of a colonial state for which such qualitative differences masked exploitative relations of power, subordination and coercion and justified non-intervention in a difficult and potentially destabilising social issue. Nor can they be separated from the strategic imperatives of abolitionists, who relied on the assumption that Indian slavery was confined to the non-productive domestic realm and was not a feature of the East Indian commodity production that they championed.

Although historians have sometimes taken them at face value, the images of Indian slavery that informed the 1833 parliamentary debate were not empirical realities, but rather the product of various overlapping and sometimes conflicting evangelical, colonial and abolitionist discourses.[42] The arguments EIC officials put forward to justify their failure to end slavery in India reflected the political expediencies of a colonial government that sought to maintain stability and reduce expenditure by ruling through indigenous structures. Likewise, the issue's ambivalent treatment in evangelical circles in Britain was impacted by wider debates about the role of free labour and free trade within the imperial project. How slavery in India was discussed was thus contingent on individual observers' perceptions both of India's place within the emerging British empire and of Britain's (or the EIC's) role in India. Yet relatively few efforts have been made to treat the ideas voiced in parliament critically, or to explore how stereotypes that passed as 'truisms' in 1833 were constructed during the preceding decades. Some of these ideas were grounded in relatively accurate assessments of Indian social conditions, of course, but many were also subject to problematic and ideologically loaded interpretation. Local vernacular records, for example, show that domestic slavery was widespread in India, but not that this necessarily implied a benign state of servitude that could be neatly de-compartmentalised from 'productive' agricultural slavery. Similarly, discussions of agricultural slavery in South India were deeply embedded in a now largely discredited colonial discourse on caste. The accepted wisdom about Indian slavery that prevailed in 1833 was not ideologically neutral, but was shaped by a range of forces:

evangelical agendas, colonial expediencies, orientalist constructions and economic imperatives all interacted to inform how Indian slavery was conceptualised in both colonial and metropolitan debates. As such, these ideas tell us relatively little about the 'reality' of Indian labour conditions, but do offer us important insights into what different British observers wanted (or needed) India to be at this pivotal point in Britain's imperial history. This book argues that the social, political and ideological imperatives of those British observers who wrote down accounts of Indian labour conditions are as important in explaining its omission from the popular imperial narrative as any inherent feature of Indian slavery itself.

Structure and scope of the book

This book focuses on the formation of colonial and evangelical discourse on Indian slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; it does not pretend to offer an empirical socio-economic study of coercive labour conditions on the subcontinent during this period. More research in this area is sorely needed, to add to the pioneering works of Dharma Kumar, Gyan Prakash, Jan Breman and Indrani Chatterjee, among others, but it is not the intended contribution of this volume to provide a new ethnographic or social history of bondage in India. The colonial sources on which it is based provide at best refracted and distorted glimpses of the everyday functioning of Indian slavery, and almost nothing about the subjectivity, or world view of the slaves themselves. In places, colonial sources apply the name 'slavery' to systems that might not now be considered as such, and in others fail to identify as slavery some forms of bondage that were equally restricting. This book explores why some conditions were deemed less free than others, and how political and ideological imperatives influenced this, but it does not intend to determine whether specific labour systems were 'really' slavery, in our contemporary parlance, or to measure South Asian forms of bondage against some archetypal West Indian plantation model. Nor does it provide an exhaustive account of all the many issues and practices that the existence of coercive or 'unfree' labour conditions in India created. Instead it discusses how various real and imagined slaveries were encountered and constructed in colonial and metropolitan discourses, both in Britain and India, and how these acted simultaneously both to reinforce colonial domination and to delineate British colonialism in the East from that in the West Indies. The book then, is a study of how slavery in India was constructed in various colonial discourses and what this tells us about ideologies of colonial rule; how ideas of Indian slavery intersect with wider debates about slavery,

abolition, trade, empire, evangelicalism, missionary enterprise and civilising mission.

The book is arranged in four parts. The next chapter in this introductory section provides a brief overview of slavery as it existed on the subcontinent and of some of the theoretical and methodological issues surrounding its study. Part II explores European involvement in slave-trading and slave-holding in late eighteenth-century India. It argues that public expressions of anti-slavery sentiment functioned politically and ideologically to legitimise EIC rule by marking it as progressive and modern in comparison with their West Indian compatriots, with other European powers on the subcontinent and with local slave-holding elites, even while individual Britons both traded slaves and used them within their own households. Part III deals with EIC attitudes to and policy on 'indigenous' forms of slavery, exploring how specific influential images of Indian slavery as qualitatively different from its West Indian counterpart were formed at the confluence of anti-slavery sentiment and political and economic pragmatism. Part IV looks at how the issue of slavery in India was treated by missionaries and abolitionists, and critiques its relative marginality within wider discourses of colonial philanthropy during the 1810s and 1820s. Finally, the conclusion brings the story up to 1843—the point where many accounts of slavery in India begin—by exploring the ideological and political imperatives that underpinned its emergence as an issue of concern for abolitionist reformers in the early 1840s.

Notes

1 The Charter was first granted to the Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies by Elizabeth I in 1600, and had to be renewed by parliament every twenty years. As EIC power in India spread, Charter renewal negotiations became an opportunity for the British government to impose its will on the Company and to bring affairs in India more closely under parliamentary supervision. See H. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

2 Howard Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 169–87. Abolitionists viewed apprenticeship as slavery by another name, and campaigned against it until it was ended eight years early in 1838.

3 Robert Inglis, HC Deb., 12 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 616–33.

4 Stanley Engerman follows the Parliamentary Papers in referring to distress sales during famines as a social safety net, although colonial records suggest that they were not always voluntary. Stanley Engerman, 'Comparative Approaches to the Ending of Slavery', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 293.

5 Duke of Wellington, HL Deb., 9 Aug. 1833, vol. 20, pp. 441–7.

6 See Charles Grant, HC Deb., 13 June 1833, vol. 18, pp. 698–785; James Buckingham, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807; Duke of Wellington, HL Deb., 9 Aug. 1833, vol. 20, pp. 441–7.

7 Indrani Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in the Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 151. This was, as Chatterjee points out, a somewhat arbitrary distinction. For more, see sect. 3.

8 Caste and its relation to slavery will be discussed in more detail in Chap. 6, but for more on the complexities of colonial interpretations of caste, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

9 Robert Inglis, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

10 Lord Ellenborough, HL Deb., 5 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 155–210.

11 Duke of Wellington, HL Deb., 9 Aug. 1833, vol. 20, pp. 441–7.

12 Lord Ellenborough, HL Deb., 5 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 155–210; Mr Buckingham, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

13 Robert Inglis, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

14 Cutlar Fergusson, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

15 Mr Buckingham, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

16 Duke of Wellington, HL Deb., 9 Aug. 1833, vol. 20, pp. 441–7.

17 Cutlar Fergusson, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807; Robert Inglis, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

18 Lord Ellenborough, HL Deb., 5 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 155–210. There was also the thorny issue of compensation, especially in Malabar, where much of the cultivation was carried out by slaves. See Robert Inglis, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

19 Charles Grant, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

20 For a full account of these developments, see Temperley, 'Delegalization'.

21 Daniel O'Connell, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807; Lord Suffield, HL Deb., 9 Aug. 1833, vol. 20, pp. 441–7.

22 Thomas Fowell Buxton, HC Deb., 17 July 1833, vol. 19, pp. 797–807.

23 Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 15.

24 Ibid.

25 Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). See also David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography* 28.3 (2004): 327.

26 See Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 177.

27 Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial'.

28 For the standard account of the 'delegalisation' of slavery in India, see Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833–1870* (London: Longman, 1972) and Temperley, 'Delegalization'. For the EIC's failure to implement abolition, see Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial'.

29 Mark Naidis, 'The Abolitionists and Indian Slavery', *Journal of Asian History* 15.2 (1981): 146–58; Temperley, 'Delegalization'.

30 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*; Richard B. Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave-trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830', *William and Mary Quarterly* 66.4 (2009): 873–94.

31 Chatterjee does explore the impact that both plantocratic and abolitionist ideas from Britain had on EIC officials, but does not take account of the 'counter-flow' by exploring how ideas from India shaped metropolitan British debates.

32 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 155.

33 Robert Inglis, HC Deb., 26 July 1833, vol. 20, pp. 14–15, 17–18.

34 James Peggs, *India's Cries to British Humanity: Relative to the Suttee, Infanticide, British Connexion with Idolatry, Ghaut Murders, and Slavery in India*, 2nd edn (London: Seely and Son, 1830). Peggs was a Baptist missionary who served for several years in India, and not, as Mark Naidis suggests, a West Indian planter. Naidis, 'Abolitionists and Indian Slavery', p. 148.

35 The *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* noted the publication of the Parliamentary Papers in a short, one-page article, but claimed their contents did not alter their existing view of East Indian slavery. *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, vol. 2, no. 41 (Oct. 1828). Revd Thomas Price, writing in 1837, noted that his colleague Mr Pringle had 'waded through' the Parliamentary Papers, 'but could not make out anything from it', and also that he had 'advised the Rev. Mr. Peggs to form an abstract of it; but even that publication does not exhibit the actual state of slavery in India so as to attract the attention of the public to it.' Thomas Price, *Slavery in America: with Notices of the Present State of Slavery and the Slave Trade Throughout the World* (London: G. Wightman, 1837), p. 79.

36 See, for example, George Saintsbury, *East India Slavery* (London: C. Tilt, 1829).

37 Price, *Slavery in America*, p. 79.

38 Indrani Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Reconnected Histories', in Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Maxwell Eaton (eds), *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 31.

39 Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies', p. 337.

40 Temperley, 'Delegalization', p. 173.

41 Parliamentary Papers, session 1837–8 (215), vol. XLVIII (henceforth PP 1837–8), p. 56.

42 See Temperley, 'Delegalization'; Naidis 'Abolitionists and Indian Slavery'.

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'To Call a Slave a Slave': Recovering Indian Slavery[1]

Walking through the Liverpool International Slavery Museum, one is struck by the force of the commonly accepted master-narrative of British slavery and abolition. The exhibits move seamlessly from idyllic African origins, through capture, the march to the coast and the middle passage, to plantation or domestic labour, abuse, torture, punishment, resistance, abolition and emancipation, before finally concluding with a contemplation of this history's impact on Britain today. It brings this now notorious story alive for the visitor with artefacts, imagery and interactive technologies, yet for an 'International' slavery museum the exhibit seems oddly blinkered; all the slaves whose lives it traces are African, and they are all moving west. Other forms of slavery and other slave trades, both throughout history and around the world, are conspicuously absent, silenced by the overwhelming and overpowering horror of the transatlantic trade and New World plantation slavery. By concentrating only on the triangular trade between Europe, Africa and the Americas, the exhibit disconnects the Atlantic from the wider global networks of commerce, capital, labour and migration that characterised the period of European colonial expansion. It also privileges a single archetypal image of slavery characterised by 'a figure of African descent bending over work in a field of sugar cane or cotton'.[2] This image dominates the popular imagination and, as David Turley notes, provides two starting points for the study of slavery: that those who were enslaved were either racially or culturally alienated outsiders and that they laboured in large-scale agricultural production of staples that were often intended for sale at far-distant markets.[3] Like the unidirectional flow of African slaves towards the New World, however, both of these features are characteristic only of a specific slave system that existed at a specific historical juncture. Over-concentration on this system, however appalling, obscures the many other slave trades, slave systems and slave experiences that existed in other times and places, and even intersected with the transatlantic trade. The

Liverpool International Slavery Museum is not unique, nor indeed unusual in its focus (or its omissions), of course; it reflects an overwhelming bias in the popular imagination that connects slavery in the modern world with the Americas and the plantation system—with sugar and cotton, with *Gone with the Wind*, *Roots* and *Armistad*. It also reflects a continuing bias in a historiography of slavery and abolition that has traditionally focused overwhelmingly on African slavery in the Americas, and all that that entailed, while largely ignoring different forms of slavery and bondage in other parts of the world.

Perhaps in reaction to this simplified and teleological popular narrative, there has been a growing movement by scholars in recent years to uncover more complicated histories of slavery. Studies focusing on local slaveries and slave trades in the Americas, Africa, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean have complicated traditional interpretations by presenting other forms of 'unfree' labour that offer alternative, but no less significant, typologies of bondage. Yet much remains to be done both to uncover these 'other slaveries' and to adjust our view of older narratives in light of them. Great strides have been taken since H. Gerbeau described the history of Indian Ocean slavery as the 'history of silence' in 1979,[4] but, compared to the numerous and detailed studies that map out the Atlantic slave trade, its Indian Ocean counterpart still remains 'largely uncharted territory'.[5] For a long time, scholars struggled to overcome the practical problems posed by an Indian Ocean world that is fractured administratively and politically, although in recent years they have been increasingly successful in uniting varied sources from diverse archives, integrating them to piece together complex commercial networks through which a human cargo of African and Indian slaves, convicts and indentured servants were moved around the region.[6] Yet, as Markus Vink notes, the most extensively studied aspects of the Indian Ocean slave trade—the east coast of Africa, the Dutch Cape Colony and the plantation economies of the Mascarene Islands (Mauritius and Réunion)—suggest an Afro-centric focus in the historiography of Indian Ocean slavery that derives from the Atlantic model itself.[7] 'The sufferings of the slaves in Asia occurred mainly in silence,' he laments, 'largely ignored by both contemporaries and modern historians' due to the 'underdevelopment of an Asian-centric historiography on colonial slavery and slave trade'.[8]

If Indian Ocean slavery studies are beginning to move out of the shadow of their Atlantic counterpart, South Asian forms of bondage remain under-represented in this new historiography. Important studies by Indrani Chatterjee, Gyan Prakash and Dharma Kumar, among others, have explored the complex relationships between caste, class, kinship, indenture, debt bondage and slavery within India itself, blurring the boundaries previously constructed by nineteenth-century discourses of 'free' and 'unfree' labour.[9] These major contributions have yet to prompt a reconsideration of India's

position within wider global networks of slavery and abolition, trade and empire, however, while the political, economic and ideological imperatives that led Indian slavery to be largely written out of the colonial narrative of Britain's second empire are still to be fully interrogated.

Recognizing other slaveries

The Slavery Convention signed at Geneva in 1926, and approved by United Nations protocol in 1953, defines slavery as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised'. Such generic definitions hardly help us to understand or differentiate between the countless statuses, processes or experiences that might characterise slavery in different parts of the world, however, and defining what constitutes slavery in global terms is no easy process. In South Asia, the wide range of forms that slavery could take defies universal categorisation, forcing us to think about relationships of extreme dependence in different ways. Orlando Patterson, for example, in his seminal work *Slavery and Social Death*, suggests that slavery represents the point at which the power dynamic present in all human relationships reaches its most unbalanced state. The master's dominance is created and maintained by violence and/or coercion, resulting in the 'social death' of the enslaved.[10] This definition holds true for New World slavery, and may even be applied to some manifestations of Indian Ocean slavery; those which were characterised by 'property or chattel status and the ensuing potential of re-isolation, institutionalized coercion and systemic exploitation, outsider status or essential kinlessness'.[11] Yet the very term 'slave' was problematic in an Indian Ocean context where slaves could be found not only in these 'closed systems' but also in 'open systems' where 'the boundary between slavery and other forms of bondage was porous and indistinct and upward mobility was possible'.[12]

In another attempt to theorise different slave systems, David Turley notes the structural difference between slave societies (in which the large number of slaves and the institutional influence of slavery were fundamental to the functioning of the economic and social systems) and societies with slaves (in which the existence and reproduction of slavery was relatively informal and required no organised system, as slaves were usually attached to households, family networks or lineages).[13] Yet even this dichotomy is hard to reconcile with Indian Ocean systems where such categories could exist simultaneously, or merge into each other. As Tanika Sarkar notes, in colonial India it was difficult categorically to delineate slavery from other forms of servitude, because almost all forms of labour were influenced by extra-economic compulsions to some degree and few were ever entirely 'free'.[14] Nearly all

members of society were embedded in wider social hierarchies and networks, demarcated by obligations and responsibilities that complicate any discussion of 'freedom' and 'unfreedom' in the western sense. In pre-colonial west India, for example, forced labour was often exacted from low caste groups for agriculture or porterage, but there were also negotiated limits on how much labour could be demanded and undertaking it did not reduce the labourers to slavery.[15] Slavery in India was not a practice that could be separated from the wider fabric of caste, community, lineage and religion, and on this basis Chatterjee suggests that rather than define slavery in absolute terms of 'free' versus 'slave' we should foreground locally specific usages and relationships and be aware that these changed both regionally and over time.[16]

The culturally specific contexts in which Indian slavery must be understood are further complicated by the fact that individuals who were enslaved might not remain in that state permanently. Slavery could be a process or transitional condition through which some people in South Asia moved, with various personal and collective outcomes.[17] Chatterjee argues that slavery was conceptualised as 'a dialectic of captivity and transfers along a socially integrated continuum, as a dialectic between alienation and intimacy, not as a static problem of "unfreedom", coerced labour, "commodity" or "property"'.[18] Domestic slaves could be integrated into both the effective and political networks of the kin/clan group, although they could also equally be excluded again, while Indian labouring classes simultaneously experienced high levels of social mobility and appalling levels of existential insecurity.[19] As a result, individuals could assume various social roles (as petty commodity producers, 'free wage labourers', debt servants or slaves) almost concurrently, or within a relatively short time-span.[20] The different types of slavery that existed in South Asia, and their unstable and fluid nature, make quantification difficult, in terms both of slave numbers and of other variables such as price. Colonial records do place cash values on some types of slaves, but, as Chatterjee notes, because there was a wide range of exchange mechanisms (not to mention currencies) through which slaves were moved, their value is often hard to settle.[21]

Slaves could also develop complex and nuanced relationships of kinship and reciprocity with their owners. Orlando Patterson emphasises the element of kinlessness or 'social death' as crucial to the condition of slavery, yet, as Indrani Chatterjee and Sumit Guha show, kinship and kinlessness were not simply biological states in pre-colonial India but were socially constructed and negotiated conditions that could be fluid and complex.[22] Feeding and clothing could symbolically transform outsiders into kin, and Chatterjee and Guha demonstrate how stories of nurturing and commensality acted to constitute bonds of kinship and authority in the histories of certain lineages. To quote them, 'since "nourishment", one of the most resonant symbols

of power in a landscape pocked with hunger, lubricated the springs and wheels of this social formation, different grades of kinless people could be tended and trained for membership of the kindred.'[23] The incorporation of various sorts of waifs, captives or slaves into the domestic economy of the household increased the social capital of the kin or clan groups.[24] Thus, rather than conforming to absolute distinctions of slavery and family drawn from Western conceptions of both the Atlantic model of slavery and the discrete and biological boundaries of the nuclear family, Chatterjee and Guha argue that we should view slavery and kinship in pre-colonial India as existing within a 'continuum of sources of social capital'.[25] Similarly, Ramya Sreenivasan suggests that 'the boundaries of lineage, clan and jati, as asserted in Rajput courtly sources and assumed in the historiography, were not absolute', but were intertwined with, and evolved through, histories of slavery and the management of slave labour, as much as through well known networks of marriage alliances within and between elite households.[26] In the colonial period, however, British preoccupation with purity of descent for determining inheritance and succession meant that the boundaries of caste, kin and clan identities became less porous. Thus, while some slaves escaped slave status and rewrote their origins in favour of clan membership, some with real biological claims of kinship, such as Rajput chiefs' illegitimate progeny with lower caste or tribal women, were assigned the status of slaves.[27]

The existence of caste also complicates our understanding of Indian slaveries. Given that caste implies community identity and belonging, it may seem counterintuitive that the 'socially dead' slave could have a caste identity. Yet evidence suggests that slaves not only kept their caste identity, but also that masters, conscious of the possible social and ritual consequences of pollution by low caste groups, deliberately identified, maintained and publicised their slaves' high caste status.[28] Chatterjee even suggests that some lower caste slaves 'passed' for members of higher castes to secure better treatment, or a higher sale price.[29] The correlation between low caste status and slavery found in many colonial accounts reflects the conflation of European concepts of slavery (as defined by coercion, hereditary status and racial difference) with their ideas about the functioning of caste. In pre-colonial India, however, caste was often less significant in determining ritual and political status than a person's relationship to powerful individuals, something that was true of slaves and non-slaves alike.[30]

As a result of the above-mentioned problems, definitions of slavery in South Asia have been harder to pin down than in the western hemisphere. Tanika Sarkar defines slavery as a labour relationship categorised by 'the master's absolute, unconditional control over the person, labour and children of the slave',[31] while Richard Eaton offers an inductive definition of slavery

as 'the condition of uprooted outsiders, impoverished insiders—or the descendants of either—serving persons or institutions on which they are wholly dependent'.[32] Under either of these definitions, India contained a range of labour arrangements that could be termed slavery, each involving slightly different patterns of servitude and ownership and each conforming, to a greater or lesser degree, to aspects of the 'traditional' typology of slavery indicated by features such as natal alienation, persons as property, chattel status, violence, coercion, race, kinlessness, dishonour, or 'social death'.[33] While some of these features might be found in some forms of South Asian slavery, they were not universal within it, and they were often tempered, supplemented or replaced by other features such as caste, kinship, debt and reciprocity. We need not now repeat Miers and Kopytoff's warning against taking Atlantic plantation ideologies of slavery as a yardstick against which to measure other societies and practices, at the expense of local historical and social contexts, but this is precisely the prism through which the EIC authorities viewed the institution, and such comparisons inflect much of the colonial archive on Indian slavery.[34] Chatterjee, for example, shows how the questions posed by the Law Commission used Atlantic plantation slavery as a framework for understanding Indian conditions: 'In what are they employed and how are they worked?' it asked. 'What species of produce are they employed in raising? Do they work in gangs, under a driver? For how many hours in the day? … Is the lash employed and to both sexes?'[35] Such questions obviously lead to direct comparisons with plantation slavery, and EIC officials continuously contrasted East and West Indian systems, emphasising the absence of 'the cruellest features … of the African trade' in order to justify convenient conceptions of benign Indian slavery. Attempts to project the New World plantation model onto South Asian forms of slavery are, of course, deeply problematic and do not advance our understanding of the many and diverse ways in which slavery functioned in India. Yet we cannot, as some historians of slavery and abolition have done, simply assume that because Indian slavery was not exactly like Atlantic plantation slavery it was entirely unique and shared none of its features. Thus, Eaton warns us against dismissing South Asian slavery as 'peculiar' or atypical—'an Oriental exception to some ideal type'.[36]

Experiences of slavery in India were diverse and subject to significant regional, social and circumstantial variations, and perhaps the resulting difficulties in applying well-worn definitions of slavery to the South Asian context have contributed to its omission from both late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century discourse and from more recent historiographies of slavery and abolition; indeed, Eaton suggests that the lack of a 'master narrative' of slavery in South Asia goes some way towards explaining its failure to impact on the popular imagination. Rather than a simple teleology

of enslavement, resistance and emancipation, Indian slavery involved a bewildering array of historically and regionally specific practices and statuses, each with different implications for the enslaved.[37] These forms of bondage have been further obscured, as Chatterjee demonstrates, by a semantic refusal to 'call a slave a slave'. Colonial sources blurred the boundaries of dependence with terms like vassal, concubine and bonded labourer,[38] while vernacular sources sometimes employed an equally ambivalent vocabulary to denote slave status in pre-colonial India.[39]

Any attempt to uncover authentic 'slave voices' in India, as elsewhere, is fraught with problems. Slaves themselves left few personal narratives, or records of their experiences, as their very status often prevented them from leaving explicitly autobiographical accounts or influencing the ways in which their lives were recounted by others. Indirect slave testimonies can be glimpsed through a diverse range of sources, however; Chatterjee describes the 'hide and seek nature of slavery in … vernacular records', as slave voices are refracted through the accounts of their masters, the colonial state, or both.[40] These records, as Eaton notes, are often 'fragmentary, opaque and tainted with the politics of the day'.[41] Thus, Ramya Sreenivasan argues that uneven record-keeping practices in Rajput courts were compounded by norms of respectability that proscribed the discussion of women in public, while increasing emphasis on glorious genealogical pasts moved ruling lineages to redefine, regulate and narrow the conditions for belonging, writing histories that emphasised purity of descent and played down slave origins.[42] Unless a slave-woman rose to a position of particular power and influence, she was unlikely to feature in the chronicles of her master's reign. Only in exceptional acts like *sati* were slaves rendered visible in the bardic accounts, and even then they did not achieve the same status as legitimate queens, as their immolations were viewed as *beli* (burning), rather than *sati*.[43] Colonial policies exacerbated older indigenous ethical norms against naming slaves as such; indeed, colonial emphasis on legitimate biological ancestry and purity of line, which could even lead to the dispossession of older slave born lineage members, encouraged reticence about slave origins among family record keepers.[44] Act 5 of 1843, which purportedly 'delegalised' slavery in India, was to some extent abolition by semantics, as it prevented judges, owners and slaves alike using that term, or claiming legal rights based on that status, and allowed British officials to deny the existence of slavery in India after this date, without actually actively emancipating any slaves.[45]

If Indian chroniclers and record keepers wrote slaves out of some of their histories, the colonial state's own records contain equally significant erasures. Colonial observers, Eaton remarks, 'often resorted to a number of rhetorical strategies when writing of slavery. Many simply ignored the phenomenon; when it could not be ignored, they disguised it, when it could not be

disguised, they rationalised it.'[46] Thus, Avril Powell notes that EIC official William Muir ignored his own strongly held anti-slavery views by turning a blind eye to slavery in some Indian courts, for fear of offending elites who were collaborating with the EIC. He was not alone; many EIC officials deployed the rhetoric of abolitionism to describe their own sentiments, while simultaneously rationalising the Indian forms of slavery in those contexts where it was inconvenient to intervene. Slave raiding, trading and holding were presented as indicative of 'un-British' rule in areas under the jurisdiction of other European powers, or Indian princes, yet many Europeans, including Britons, kept domestic slaves in eighteenth-century British India, and EIC authorities defended Indian slave-owners' property rights well into the nineteenth century.[47]

Even when colonial officials addressed slavery directly there was huge diversity in the quality of the material they collected, and few provided detailed information about their sources or the context of their knowledge production. Some experienced and conscientious officials might undertake detailed surveys of their area, or instigate inquiries into specific issues, but many did not, and provided only cursory and unhelpful responses gleaned uncritically from what their Indian subordinates chose to tell them.[48] Benedicte Hjejle's 1967 warning on this front remains extremely apposite; the concerns raised about the reliability of colonial sources have since been augmented by the theoretical and methodological developments spawned by the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. All colonial officials were subject, to some degree, to the subliminal influences and imperatives that linked colonial knowledge formation to the exercise of colonial power, while many were also reliant on elite Indians for information, who in turn might have had their own agendas to consider. Thus, although it can be both useful and productive to 'read against the grain' of the colonial archive, the accounts it contains should not be read uncritically or taken at face value.

The critical analysis of the colonial archive on slavery has been pioneered by Gyan Prakash. He argues that colonial discourses of slavery and freedom were influenced by post-Enlightenment ideas of individualism and a bourgeois capitalist economy. These were inapplicable to an Indian context in which various issues of status and obligation interacted to form relationships of dependence, outside of systems of monetary exchange.[49] Ravi Ahuja, on the other hand, argues in favour of the continued use of terms such as 'slavery', 'free' and 'unfree' labour to describe Indian conditions. To do so, he argues, need not imply acceptance of bourgeois assumptions about the normality of free wage labour, but rather reflects a pragmatic utilisation of well-known definitions at a time when 'incisive alternative theoretical concepts are still not at hand'.[50] It is not the intention of this book to

determine whether specific Indian labour relations were 'free' or 'unfree', or to seek alternative terminology to categorise different labour relationships in India, but rather to explore colonial constructions of slavery in India and their reception in Britain, for what information they offer regarding abolitionist conceptions of the conditions of colonial, and metropolitan, production.

A brief history of slavery in India[51]

Slavery in South Asia has a long and diverse history. Slaving occurred intermittently along the so-called 'Muslim–Hindu frontier', beginning with Mahmud of Ghazni's many raids into the subcontinent between 1000 and 1025 AD, and continuing throughout the periods of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughal Empire (1526–1857).[52] In the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, men captured in war raids were redeployed as slave soldiers in the armies of the Sultanates of Delhi, Ahmadnagar and Bijapur, and the last two states also recruited slave soldiers from East Africa. Sultan Iltmatush of Delhi (who had himself once been a slave) sent agents to the great central Asian slave markets to buy military slaves, a trend that continued during subsequent centuries. Some such slaves conformed to the archetypal image of the alienated outsider, although others assimilated into the host society in ways not possible in the New World; for these groups, slavery was less a fixed status than a specific origin, which could be renegotiated over time.[53] In sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Deccan, Ethiopian slaves were often 'rapidly integrated into the households of their masters, who were themselves often assimilated ex-slaves from East Africa'. Many embraced Deccani politics and culture, married Deccani women and integrated themselves into local society, both before and after manumission.[54]

The Mughals did not use slave soldiers to conquer India, as the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate had done, and even sought to limit the extent of slavery in their dominions.[55] In 1562, Akbar ended the practice of enslaving the families of war captives, freeing his own war slaves twenty years later. And in 1608, Jahangir banned the long-standing custom of sending eunuch slaves from Bengal in lieu of cash revenue. The Mughals did not maintain slave soldiers, nor did they recruit and manage slaves for economic purposes within their borders, although they did participate actively in the Central Asian trade, in which slaves featured prominently. They deported state rebels and revenue defaulters as slaves to Central Asian markets, using the Ghakkar community of the Punjab as middle men and purchasing war horses in exchange. Domestic slavery flourished in elite Mughal households, just as it

did in those of their Rajput and Maratha counterparts, but otherwise they prohibited all use of slaves within their frontiers. There are clear political motives for such actions. Mughal officers might build up unwelcome power bases if they could turn slaves into personal retainers, or sell them for their own enrichment. Moreover, when tax-paying peasants were enslaved, their revenue was lost to the imperial treasury, depriving the central government of potential income. That the Mughals authorised the capture and enslavement of revenue defaulters underlines this pragmatic agenda.[56]

Individuals could fall into slavery in many ways. Casual robbery could often result in murder and kidnapping, with the surviving victims being kept by force, or sold into slavery. Capture in battle, a common route into slavery since the times of the Delhi Sultanate, continued in pre-colonial west India, and women taken during war served as concubines, domestic servants or dancers in many Rajput ruling houses.[57] The Maratha regime did not use slaves in military roles, but male and female war captives served in state-controlled forts, working in agriculture, tending horse and elephant stables and preparing gunpowder and firearms. Slaves (as valuables) might be transferred in lieu of debts or tax arrears, while non slave-women might also be enslaved for arrears in taxes or non-payment of fines owed by their households, as might women detained for 'sexual immorality' if they could not pay the resulting charges. The children of female domestics fathered by any of the men of the house were considered family property. Sumit Guha notes that a disproportionate number of male slaves in eighteenth-century Maharashtra fell into this category of 'home-born', suggesting that it was primarily women who were subject to slave-trafficking; an idea reinforced by the records of the colonial state which refer to the trade as one in 'women and children'.[58]

Evidence from pre-colonial Rajasthan suggests that women were particularly vulnerable to forced enslavement during times of conflict. The fate of women captured during war varied; some were sold, others distributed among the ordinary soldiery, while those of higher birth or valuable specialised skills might be integrated into the households of the conquering chiefs, with or without marriage.[59] Such incorporation both increased the social capital of the victors and represented a symbolic violation of the enemy. Srinivasan recites the story of the fifteenth-century chief Rao Rinmal of Jodhpur, who on defeating the Sisodiya Rajputs of Mewar created a wedding pavilion by 'cut[ting] off the heads of the Sisodiyas and plant[ing] them on stakes to create an enclosure', where he then married the daughters of the Sisodiyas to the victorious Rathors.[60] Such gendered narratives of abduction during war are complicated by critical readings of some of the 'origin stories' of male adopted kin, however. Chatterjee and Guha, for example, recount the story of Ranoji (later known as Fatteh Singh), son of a defeated chief who was taken

in by Maratha warrior king Shahu, the grandson of Shivaji Bhonsle. While official accounts legitimised his incorporation into the kin group by claiming that the child was cast upon Shahu's mercy by his mother, Chatterjee and Guha offer a darker reading of his origins, questioning how we understand the status of a child 'plucked from a burning village during times of war'.[61]

Distress sales as a consequence of debt or impoverishment represented another important route into slavery in many parts of India, especially in the wake of natural or man-made disasters. Sylvia Vatuk notes that the *nawabs* (Muslim rulers/nobles) of the Karnatic acquired most of their slaves from local markets where people sold themselves or family members in the hope of escaping starvation.[62] The colonial archive is replete with accounts of the large-scale distress sales that accompanied almost every serious famine, and such practices have led some colonial observers and subsequent historians to talk about slavery functioning as a social safety net in pre-colonial Indian society.[63] As Ravi Ahuja notes,

> recurrent subsistence crises imperilled the lives of 'free wage labourers' and petty commodity producers even more than those of bonded labourers, whose masters had at least an interest to support their debtors, servants or slaves in famine periods. If wage labour relations were often more attractive and lucrative than customary agrarian relationships in years of peace and rich harvests, the picture changed dramatically in times of crisis when bondage could prove to be preferable.[64]

As will be seen in the next chapters, European slave-traders used arguments about these traditional practices to justify their own purchase of slave cargos from famine-stricken areas. European conceptions of the type of ownership such a purchase bestowed were, however, quite different from 'traditional' Indian ones, in which such relations were dissoluble if a master was unable, or unwilling, to fulfil his obligation to support his slaves, or the slaves accrued enough surplus to buy themselves out of slavery again.[65] Moreover, colonial accounts suggest that those offered for sale in times of hardship were not always complicit in the transaction, as slave-dealers, procurers and other middle-men exploited the situation to acquire slaves for sale using varying levels of violence and coercion.[66]

Loans or advances of money marked the bonding labourers to their masters in a relationship that colonial officials saw as neither exactly slave nor entirely free.[67] Powerful local elites, or moneylenders, might hold the right to the person and labour of their debtor indefinitely, without that debtor specifically being denoted a slave. For example, Ravi Ahuja notes that a handful of prosperous entrepreneurs emerged in late eighteenth-century Madras, who, as well as being major boat owners, claimed also to hold the

majority of the 'boat men' in debt bondage.[68] In other areas, 'debt bondage' was thought to characterise agrarian relationships between individuals and even whole castes. In theory, debtor relationships were terminable on the repayment of the loan, but in practice clearing even relatively small debts often proved impossible, and those held in debt bondage often slipped into a condition of permanent and inheritable dependency and thus slavery.[69] Gyan Prakash argues that although the British reimagined these relationships as 'debt-bondage' after 1843, in fact the relationships of dependence between *Kamia* labourers and their masters in Bihar were based on status rather than monetary exchange.[70]

Many wealthy Hindu and Muslim families also held long-standing domestic slaves, who were used for household and limited agricultural labour. These were usually acquired locally, through kidnapping, distress sales, voluntary or debt bondage or intermarriage with existing slaves. They remained the property of their masters and could theoretically be sold, although many stayed within the same households for generations. They might be employed in a range of domestic tasks; in larger households these could be specific and specialised (e.g., washing, cooking, animal husbandry, tailoring, wet-nursing), while in smaller establishments the same slave might be expected to take on more general duties. Male slaves might accompany their masters on military campaigns and undertake a range of roles and functions around the camp, while female slave roles in Rajput households might include entertainment (in the case of specialised slave performers), sexual services, the organisation and running of the *zenana*, or basic domestic labour. Slaves thus had both different functions and skills and different positions within the hierarchy of the household.[71] Such positions could be fluid, however, with relatively lowly slaves rising to consequence if they caught the eye of their master, or forged relationships with powerful women in the *zenana*.[72] In the factional conflicts of court and *zenana*, slave-women could be a valuable resource, and some rose to prominence through political services to influential queens, rather than through sexual services to their masters. Unlike concubines, who often relied on their youth and sexual attractiveness for their influence, these slave-women moved inwards and upwards through the political hierarchies of the *zenana* with age.[73]

In elite Rajput households, the honour of marriage was reserved for women of appropriate status and lineage, and the boundaries between the position of wife and that of even the most favoured concubine were ritually observed.[74] Despite this, some slaves rose to positions of considerable prominence. Chatterjee and Guha discuss the cases of Virubhai, a slave-woman who achieved a powerful position in the house of Maratha leader Shahu, grandson of Shivaji Bhonsle, and of the Dowager queen of Kohlapur, who entrusted the running of five divisions of her state to five of her

slave-women.[75] Similarly, Sreenivasan notes the influence that the concubines Gulabrai and Raskapur had over Vijay Singh of Jodhpur (1752–93) and Jagat Singh of Jaipur (1803–18) respectively.[76] Slaves could thus be found in close proximity to, and were sometime indistinguishable from, people of power and birth. They could accumulate property in the form of land, houses, jewellery, cattle, and even hold their own slaves.[77] *Pardayat* women, the most favoured level of concubine in the Rajput household, often had their own independent allowances for 'personal expenses' through revenue grants and servants/slaves provided by the state.[78] Raskapur had half the resources of Jaipur state made over to her, was given the respect due to Jagat Singh's formal queens, rode with the ruler on the same elephant in formal processions and had coins minted in her name. Yet the case of Raskapur also underlines how unstable and how dependent on the will of the master even the most successful and influential slaves were; she fell out of favour and was imprisoned. Her subsequent fate is not known.[79]

Even powerful slaves were subject to the vagaries of generational shifts, as their influence, position and entitlements could be revoked by a new ruler who replaced his successor's entourage with his own. Lower-level domestic servants were likely to survive such transitions better than those higher up, whose position was dependent on the sexual or political preference of a specific powerful person. Concubines lost not only land and revenue grants with the death of their master, but often had to return even their jewellery to the state treasury.[80] Severed from political influence and in keeping with Rajput custom, some concubines immolated themselves with their master's body. Such actions can be understood as an honourable escape from the ignominy, impoverishment and humiliation that accompanied loss of status, the repayment of a debt of food, or a form of institutional assassination that was later rewritten in the chronicles as an act of self-sacrifice and devotion.[81]

Many domestic slaves remained with the same families for generations, but the sale, mortgage and rent of slaves was permitted, depending on the economic and political circumstances of the master. Ruling Rajput and Maratha houses used female slaves as tokens of exchange in political negotiations; skilled slave performers were particularly sought after. As embodiments of the time, labour, resources and skills invested in their training, they were significant status symbols for the courts that held them, reflecting the wealth and prestige of their owner.[82] Their circulation served to articulate political hierarchies between elite houses, but could also be the source of conflict between chiefs; if the voluntary transfer of slave performers could create and reinforce bonds of vassalage, their forcible acquisition signified subjugation and loss of sovereignty.[83] Slaves, especially women and children, were highly acceptable gifts and often circulated from household to household, being given as dowry, as tribute to ruling houses, or as gifts to favoured servants.

Such movements remind us that however favoured the slaves' status within the household, they were ultimately transferable. Sreenivasan suggests that while the offspring of concubines were not usually bought and sold, their daughters, in particular, functioned as useful tokens of exchange in political negotiations. The sons of slaves, and especially of wet nurses, were more likely to be incorporated into the kin groups as putative foster brothers, and their loyal service might be recorded in the chronicles. Unlike in Bengal or the Deccan, however, in the Rajput states they were less likely to gain political prominence, or even chiefship, as the resources of queens' natal lineages usually gave their sons the edge over the offspring of concubines.[84]

In order to make a gift of a slave, of course, the giver had to own or acquire one to give. The growing need to include slaves in status-enhancing dowries in Rajput states contributed to the growth of slave-trading and slave markets in the region.[85] Internal boundaries, such as that between the Hyderabad, Mysore and the southern Maratha states, or the frontier region of the colonial state around Agra and Delhi, provided important sites for such slave markets.[86] Triplicane, the suburb in Madras in which the darbar was located and where most Muslim nobles resided, was one of the city's main markets for the sale of slave-children in the 1790s.[87] Despite British efforts to suppress the trade, a small but lucrative import/export business survived and slaves continued to be sold openly at market in Rajput and Maratha states like Gwalior well into the 1830s, as chiefs bought slaves with cash both for their own households, to use in dowries, and in gift exchanges with families in other states.

If even long-standing domestic slaves were ultimately transferable, those who were trafficked were subject to significant levels of violence and coercion. Though spared the infamous horrors of 'the middle passage', many were acquired against their will and suffered both natal alienation and familial rupture. These individuals or families were often 'dragged or pushed across multiple geographical, social and cultural boundaries at different times in the process of being made slaves'.[88] The distress caused by such arbitrary acquisitions is evidenced by the many petitions made to EIC representatives for the restoration of family members or the protection of escaped slaves.[89] Like their New World counterparts, these slaves struggled to find what Eugene D. Genovese refers to as the 'living space' needed to assert their autonomous human identity over their status as chattel.[90] There is also evidence that they were subject to sadistic punishment and torture, despite the EIC officially limiting slave-holders' power to 'reasonable' forms of chastisement. Although good treatment was certainly possible, the slave remained dependent on their owner's will and they could be subject to physical punishment and sexual exploitation.[91] In 1789, the *Calcutta Gazette* reported that Mir Faizal Ali, a sepoy, had been convicted and condemned to death for the murder

of his slave-girl Sauma by 'repeated acts of horrid and uncommon cruelty',[92] while in 1813, Khyrun Nissah Khanun, 'a married woman of respectability', was fined 200 rupees for cruelty towards her eleven-year-old slave-girl, 'beating and burning her privy parts, and other parts of her body'.[93] Thus, while Tanika Sarkar claims that anecdotal evidence suggests that long-serving domestic slaves were usually well treated, Chatterjee argues that this suggestion occludes the violence and domination borne by slaves even in domestic settings.[94] The implication that because slaves and masters existed in close proximity to each other labour conditions had become favourable to the slave, she argues, echoed the trope of the plantation as a 'big happy family', a common theme in the defence of slavery in Britain and America.[95] British colonial observers often noted that Indian domestic slaves were well treated and did not desire their freedom. Such observations are obviously problematic, especially given the number of petitions for precisely this that the colonial state received. However, as Sumit Guha points out, slavery and freedom were not absolutes. Resistance and flight in pre-colonial and colonial India were not always aimed at absolute freedom, but could be used as a mechanism to secure an improvement of the slave's lot under conditions of servitude. Thus, a runaway slave might be willing to be gifted to a larger, wealthier establishment, but not to return to a poor or cruel master's house. Absolute freedom could involve being cast friendless into a harsh world, and for some a better life within the context of slavery was a more viable proposition.[96]

As we will see in the next chapter, some Europeans in late eighteenth-century India held not only Indian but also African chattel slaves. Most African slaves who came into India, however, were bound for the homes of the Hindu or Muslim nobility, where they carried out domestic and ceremonial functions, in some cases being used as eunuchs or retainers. Pedro Machado has pointed to the involvement of Hindu Gujarati merchants in the slave trade from Mozambique via the Portuguese Indian enclaves of Goa, Daman and Dui, whence African slaves were often re-exported into the hinterland. Dui, in particular, was integrated into a north-west India trading complex, and slaves imported there were largely sold on to Kathiawar, Kutch and Sindh, often changing hands several times before reaching their final destination. In Kathiawar, African slaves were employed in domestic, ceremonial and military service, while in Dui they were often needed for maritime labour. Women and young girls were in particular demand for their domestic and sexual services. Indeed, Machado notes 'cases of Kutchi women being sent to East Africa for the express purpose of purchasing young girls to be brought up to prostitution'.[97] The number of slaves imported was not high, and fluctuated considerably, ranging from a small handful to 200 or 300 annually between 1770 and 1834. The existence

of African slavery in India is an important and under-researched dimension of the wider global networks of slavery and slave-trading in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but is largely beyond the scope of this book, which focuses primarily on discourses surrounding the enslavement of Indians. This is not to undermine the importance of recent and ongoing studies, especially the work on the EIC's own involvement in trafficking African slaves.[98]

In addition to domestic slavery, there were a number of agricultural labour relationships in different parts of India that British colonial officials deemed 'unfree'. Ravi Ahuja notes three distinct forms of agricultural labour relations in the early colonial Madras Presidency. *Paraiyar* or *palli* farmhands (sometimes called *pannaiyals*) were collectively 'bound to their home village's soil'. Their mobility was severely restricted, but the powers exercised by their masters were also limited—such slaves could not be expelled or transferred to another village, even if their masters left the region themselves.[99] *Padiyals*, or hired servants, worked on annual contracts in a relationship that 'resembled free wage labour, in that it did not imply unlimited subsidiary rights to land use or the village's crop'.[100] Yet, Ahuja notes, the forms of compensation for labour received by *pannaiyals* and *padiyals* did not differ substantially, because monetary payment was still supplemented by usufructuary rights and crop shares.[101] Finally, there was agrestic slavery, in which the master was the 'private proprietor' of the slave, could exploit his productive and reproductive capacities and sell, mortgage or rent him out as he pleased. Despite this, Ahuja notes that

> even agrestic slaves enjoyed some of the customary rights of the other categories of agricultural labourers. Compensation of labour was thus similar in all three forms of organising agricultural production. Therefore, these forms should not be regarded as separate phenomena but rather as divergent tendencies in the development of class relations between dominant peasants and agricultural labourers.[102]

As Dharma Kumar argues, the term slavery does not adequately describe the many forms of bondage existing within 'traditional' agrarian relations, which ranged from 'chattel slavery to debt peonage' and also incorporated various caste-based obligations.[103] Caste involved a number of 'slavery-like' criteria, such as restrictions on personal freedom, forced labour and ownership,[104] but in some communities the control of elite groups over the person, labour and offspring of the slaves, in perpetuity, went far beyond ordinary caste obligations.[105] Marcus Vink attributes the origins of *jati*-based slave statuses to the Aryan conquest (after 1500 BCE) and the assimilation into the caste structure of autochthonous peoples as enslaved *dasas*. Such interpretations are problematic, however, as historians now contest both the idea of Aryan

invasion and the existence of a coherent caste society in this early period. Moreover, Chatterjee argues that the caste system, and our conception of it, have been fundamentally impacted by its codification by colonial officials and scholars, who were themselves influenced by plantocratic ideals and assumptions based on their experiences of slavery in other parts of the world.[106] Ideas of social disabilities inherited in the blood as a feature of caste are thus very much a European imposition that reflects legal and social frameworks of North American slavery.[107] Rather than caste society, the 'inner frontier' in South Asia separating tribal peoples (*adivasis*), who were hunter–gatherers, shifting cultivators and pastoral nomads in the interior forest and hill tracts, from the sedentary wet rice farmers of the coastal and riverine floodplains, is perhaps better understood in terms of the latter's control over the means of violence. This allowed them to expand the agricultural frontier in the medieval and early modern periods, reducing many forest and pastoral peoples, along with war captives and other outsiders, to various degrees of dependency, including slavery.

Although practices varied between regions and caste groups, in settled agricultural slave communities natal alienation was rare, as slaves were tied to the land and the separate sale and spatial removal of family members was uncommon. Agricultural conditions were often harsh, however, and while slave-holders lacked absolute power of life and death they could inflict physical punishment, limit movement and control surplus. As with domestic slavery, there was disagreement among British observers about the material condition of Indian agricultural slaves; some believed they occupied a relatively privileged position, while others presented them as entirely wretched and inadequately provided for, describing their 'degraded, diminutive and squalid appearance, their dropsical pot bellies contrasting horribly with their skeleton arms and legs; half starved, hardly clothed'.[108]

Indian forms of slavery were varied, regionally and historically specific, and involved complex relationships of dependence and obligation. As such they did not conform to the plantation model of transatlantic plantation slavery, but nor did they necessarily represent the innocuous social institutions that some EIC officials claimed. Indian slavery could involve many of the material features decried by abolitionists, which contravened their ideological constructions about the human right to individual freedom and control over person, family and labour. Moreover, the importation of European ideas of slavery and its ramifications, together with the implementation of various aspects of EIC policy, had far-reaching effects that altered the nature of the relationships of dependence and obligation that they termed slavery, even as they were actively debating them.

Notes

1 The phrase 'to call a slave a slave' is borrowed from Frederick Cooper, via Indrani Chatterjee, who notes that like colonialists in Africa and American colonial officials and vernacular records in India often avoided having to confront slavery by refusing to name it as such. Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 1.

2 David Turley, *Slavery* (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 1.

3 Ibid.

4 H. Gerbeau, 'The Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean: Problems Facing the Historian and Research to be Undertaken', in *The African Slave Trade from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (Paris: Unesco, 1979), p. 184.

5 Markus Vink, '"The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of World History* 14.2 (2003): 132.

6 For the Indian Ocean, see Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Edward A. Alpers, Gwyn Campbell and Michael Salman, *Resisting Bondage in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007); Gwyn Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and Portland, Oreg.: Frank Cass, 2004); Gwyn Campbell, *Abolition and its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Marina Carter, 'Indian Labour Migration to Mauritius and the Indenture Experience, 1834–1874', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1987); W. G. Clarence-Smith, *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1989); Deryck Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998); Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade'.

7 Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', p. 133.

8 Ibid., pp. 132–3.

9 See Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*; Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Maxwell Eaton (eds), *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gyan Prakash, 'Terms of Servitude: The Colonial Discourse on Bondage and Servitude in India', in Martin Allen Klein (ed.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Dharma Kumar, 'Caste and Landlessness in South India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4.3 (1962): 337–63; Dharma Kumar, 'Colonialism, Bondage and Caste in British India', in Klein, *Breaking the Chains*; Tanika Sarkar, 'Bondage in the Colonial Context', in Utsa Patnaik and Manjari Dingwaney (eds), *Chains of Servitude: Bondage and Slavery in India* (Madras and Hyderabad: Sangam, 1985).

10 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

11 Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', p. 136.

12 Ibid.

13 Turley, *Slavery*, p. 4.

14 Sarkar, 'Bondage in the Colonial Context', p. 97.

15 Sumit Guha, 'Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India, 1700–1800', Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*, p. 163.

16 Indrani Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Connected Histories: Slavery and the Historiography of South Asia', Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*, p. 19; Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 4.
17 Richard Eaton, 'Introduction', Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*, p. 8.
18 Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Connected Histories', p. 19.
19 Ravi Ahuja, 'Labour Relations in an Early Colonial Context: Madras, *c.*1750–1800', *Modern Asian Studies* 36.4 (2002): 825.
20 Ibid.
21 Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Connected Histories', p. 20.
22 Indrani Chatterjee and Sumit Guha, 'Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince: Slavery and Social Capital in Eighteenth-Century India', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 36.2 (1999): 167.
23 Ibid., p. 170.
24 Ibid.
25 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 171.
26 Ramya Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines: Female Slaves in Rajput Polity, 1500–1850', Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*, p. 137.
27 Ibid., p. 140.
28 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 8.
29 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 8.
30 Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 8.
31 Sarkar, 'Bondage in the Colonial Context', p. 97.
32 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 2.
33 Ibid., p. 1.
34 Cited in Guha, 'Slavery, Society, and the State', p. 162.
35 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 1.
36 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 3.
37 Ibid., p. 1.
38 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 1.
39 Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Connected Histories', p. 26.
40 Ibid., p. 32.
41 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 9.
42 Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines', pp. 136–8.
43 Ibid.
44 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 9.
45 See Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial'.
46 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 9.
47 Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Connected Histories', p. 33.
48 Benedicte Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India in the Nineteenth Century* (Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1967), pp. 71–4.
49 Prakash, 'Terms of Servitude', pp. 1–11.
50 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 795.
51 This section draws heavily on the excellent articles collected in Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*.
52 The term 'Muslim–Hindu frontier' should, as Vink notes, be used with caution. It should not be taken to imply a 'precise line' in a region where Muslim rule over both

Muslim and non-Muslim subjects was uneven and fluid. Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', p. 157.

53 See, for example, the contributions of Ali, Jackson, Kumar and Eaton to Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*.

54 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 8.

55 The Mughal conquest elite that accompanied Babur comprised of a band of kinsmen and allies including free Turks, Iranians and Mughals.

56 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 11. See also Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade'.

57 See Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines'. For more on slaves in Rajput families, see also Varsha Joshi, *Polygamy and Purdah: Women and Society among Rajputs* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1995).

58 This account of slavery in Maharastra is drawn from Guha, 'Slavery, Society, and the State', especially pp. 165–71.

59 Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines', p. 139.

60 Significantly, even these forced transfers of the women of the vanquished are legitimised in the chronicles through the mechanism of marriage. Ibid.

61 Chatterjee and Guha, 'Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince', pp. 176–7.

62 Sylvia Vatuk, 'Bharattee's Death: Domestic Slave-Women in Nineteenth-Century Madras', in Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*.

63 Stanley Engerman, 'Comparative Approaches to the Ending of Slavery', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 293.

64 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 824.

65 Ibid., p. 812.

66 These ideas will be explored further in Chap. 2, below.

67 See Prakash, *Bonded Histories*; Jan Breman, *Labour Bondage in West India: From Past to Present* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

68 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 813.

69 Eaton, 'Introduction', p. 6.

70 Prakash, 'Terms of Servitude'.

71 Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines', p. 142.

72 'Gaining royal favour could be a dangerous affair, however, as in the context of the polygamous household, where political power and authority rested on closeness to the chief and queens were already in competition with each other, slave-girls who caught their master's eye could provoke queenly ire'. Ibid., pp. 144–5.

73 Ibid., p. 149.

74 Ibid., p. 144.

75 Chatterjee and Guha, 'Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince', pp. 165–86.

76 Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines', p. 147.

77 Guha, 'Slavery, Society, and the State', p. 172.

78 Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines', p. 145.

79 Ibid., p. 147.

80 Ibid., pp. 149–51.

81 Ibid., p. 152.

82 Ibid., p. 140. Also Guha, 'Slavery, Society, and the State'.

83 Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines', p. 141.

84 Ibid., p. 154.

85 Ibid., p. 146.

86 Guha, 'Slavery, Society, and the State', p. 169.

87 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 806.

88 Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Connected Histories', p. 23.
89 See Andrea Major, 'Enslaving Spaces: Domestic Slavery and the Spatial, Ideological and Practical Limits of Colonial Control in the Nineteenth-Century Rajput and Maratha States', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 46.3 (2009): 315–42.
90 Sarkar, 'Bondage in the Colonial Context', p. 100.
91 Ibid.
92 *Calcutta Gazette; or, Oriental Advertiser*, vol. 10, issue 252 (1788).
93 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), p. 225.
94 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 3.
95 Ibid., p. 4.
96 Guha, 'Slavery, Society, and the State', p. 176.
97 Pedro Machado, 'A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave trade, *c.*1730–1830', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 24.2 (2003): 26–7.
98 For example, the current work of Richard B. Allen.
99 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 798.
100 Ibid., p. 799.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., pp. 799–80.
103 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 5.
104 Ibid.
105 Sarkar, 'Bondage in the Colonial Context', pp. 99–110.
106 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 6.
107 Ibid., p. 7.
108 Sarkar, 'Bondage in the Colonial Context', p. 107.

II

European Slaveries

Introduction:
Slavery and Colonial Expansion in India

In December 1771, a man named James Somerset was confined in irons on board the *Anne and Mary*, a ship then anchored in the Thames. Somerset, who had been a slave in Virginia and Massachusetts, came to England with his master, Charles Stewart, in 1769. After absconding from Stewart's service, he was recaptured in November 1771 and, on refusing to return to his master's service, handed over for transportation to Jamaica, to be resold into slavery. Fortunately for Somerset, his plight caught the attention of anti-slavery leaders John Marlow, Thomas Walkin and Elizabeth Cade, who, with the help of Granville Sharp, petitioned the Chief Justice Lord Mansfield for a writ of habeas corpus to release him. The case that followed represented a landmark in the history of British attitudes to slavery, because when Lord Mansfield announced his verdict in June 1772 he found that, because enslavement could not exist without a positive law to uphold it, it could not be enforced in Britain. The precise implications of Mansfield's decision are contested; some historians see it as marking the abolition of slavery in the metropole, while others argue that its significance has been exaggerated, because de facto slavery continued after this date.[1] Whether it materially altered the conditions of servitude for Africans and Asians in Britain, Mansfield's decision did formalise emerging assumptions that slavery was incompatible with British subjecthood. 'The spirit of liberty is so deeply implanted in our Constitution, and rooted even in our very soil,' William Blackstone noted in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1775), 'that a slave or a Negro, the moment he lands in England, falls under the protection of the laws and so far becomes a freeman, though the master's right to his service may possibly still continue."[2]

Just as Mansfield was forming his judgment, 8,000 miles away in Calcutta the Committee of Circuit in Bengal was considering plans for the more effective regulation of justice in the EIC's newly acquired Indian territories. In the same month that Mansfield delivered his decision, it put forward a

novel and controversial plan for dealing with the *dacoits* (bandits) who had been plaguing the region. In language that foreshadowed later debates on *thuggee* and criminal tribes, exceptionally rigorous tactics were justified on the basis that 'The Dacoits of Bengal are not like the robbers of England … they are robbers by profession and even by birth.'[3] These hereditary lawbreakers, it was argued, formed wider criminal communities that subsisted on the spoils of their predations and were 'all therefore alike criminals; wretches who have placed themselves in a state of declared war with the government, and are therefore wholly excluded from every benefit of its laws'.[4] In order to deter such lawlessness and wean these 'criminals by birth' from their turbulent ways, the Committee suggested the shocking tactics of publicly executing guilty parties in the midst of their communities, fining their village and selling their families into slavery. 'We confess that the means we propose can in no wise be reconciled to the spirit of our own constitution', the Committee admitted regarding this latter clause, but added that 'until that of Bengal attains the same perfection, no conclusion can be drawn from the English law that can be properly applied to the manners or state of this country.'[5] The moral ambiguity of using enslavement as a judicial sanction was thus acknowledged, but its validity in the Indian context defended on the grounds that

> [the] ideas of slavery borrowed from our American colonies, will make every modification of it appear, in the eyes of our own countrymen in England, a horrible evil; but it is far otherwise in this country; here slaves are treated as the children of the families to which they belong, and often acquire a much happier state by their slavery than they could have hoped for by the enjoyment of liberty.[6]

The Committee of Circuit's suggestion that they might use enslavement as a judicial tactic, though brief, unique and never ultimately enforced, invokes many of the ideas, themes and tensions that shaped EIC policy on slavery throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although not then aware of Mansfield's decision, the terms of the Committee of Circuit's discussion reflected their recognition of the popular humanitarian and constitutional sentiment that underpinned both the burgeoning anti-slavery movement in Britain and the specific ruling in the Somerset case. Yet Indian conditions were seen as exceptional and Indian slavery represented as qualitatively different from that of the western hemisphere. Applicable only to Britain, the Mansfield decision did not alter the condition or status of slaves in India, whether held by Indians or by Europeans, and although the EIC took early steps to prevent the forcible enslavement and exportation of its subjects by other European powers, it usually confirmed the rights of masters

over their existing slaves. In 1817, for example, in the wake of metropolitan British legislation reinforcing the ban on slave-trading (1811), Governor-General Francis Rawdon-Hastings, the Earl of Moira, could specifically declare that 'A slave by entering the Company's territories does not become free'.[7] Thus, although the EIC was sensitive, from the start, to anti-slavery sentiment, this did not translate into early or effective legislation to bring about its abolition. Indeed, slavery continued in India long after the Emancipation Act of 1833, from which it was specifically exempt. Humanitarian considerations, though rhetorically prominent in EIC official discourse, were almost always subordinate to political pragmatism and the imperatives of stability and order. When forced to defend the continuance of slavery in its territories, the EIC officials argued that, as the product of indigenous Indian society, slavery there was qualitatively different from its transatlantic counterpart, being generally mild. Such official constructions of benign Indian slavery were, however, deeply influenced by the discursive imperatives of the EIC state, as they conveniently masked exploitative relations of power, subordination and coercion, and justified non-intervention in a difficult and potentially destabilising social issue.

The Committee of Circuit's suggestion that the families of *dacoits* should be enslaved suggests that, for a moment in 1772, the EIC actively considered enslaving some of its Indian subjects. Although this was never enforced, its discussion prompts us to ask why the EIC did not seek to introduce West Indian-style plantation slavery to India, or to exploit its large Indian population as a source of slaves for other colonies. In fact, eighteenth-century Europeans, including some Britons, were involved in buying, selling and exporting Indian slaves, transferring them around the subcontinent or to European slave colonies across the globe. Moreover, many eighteenth-century European households in India included domestic slaves, with the owners' right of property over them being upheld in law. Thus, although both colonial observers and subsequent historians usually represent South Asian slavery as an indigenous institution, with which the British were only concerned as colonial reformers, until the end of the eighteenth century Europeans were deeply implicated in both slave-holding and slave-trading in the region. The EIC did not formalise this involvement, however, for, though many would argue that nineteenth-century use of indentured labour on plantations, in India and globally, fulfilled British imperial labour requirements with a 'new form of slavery' after emancipation in 1833, the EIC generally resisted the incorporation of overt chattel slavery into its territories.[8] This is not, of course, to subscribe to the myth, popular with early nineteenth-century abolitionists, that the EIC state was one based on 'free labour'. The EIC was complicit in various forms of slavery and bonded labour, and its policies often limited labour options and reinforced patterns

of dependency between peasants and proprietors. Yet, the EIC did not seek to reproduce the West Indian slave model in India, and it is worth briefly considering why.

Ruled by a royal chartered company, the EIC's Indian possessions occupied a unique and anomalous place within the empire, the significance of which was the subject of heated metropolitan debate as EIC territorial control expanded in the late eighteenth century. Contemporaries in Britain saw in the EIC the 'best and worst of mercantilism: a commercial monopoly with a prodigious appetite for irregular political expansion wherever it saw the possibility of future markets.'[9] Initially a junior partner in the sophisticated commercial networks of the Mughal Empire, the EIC became increasingly involved in subcontinental politics, to the extent that by the late eighteenth century, after victories at Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764), it was granted the *diwani* of Bengal: the administration of the region and the right to collect the revenue. It also expanded its influence over local rulers in the south, and, though nominally subordinate to the Mughal Emperor, by the 1770s it held political power in substantial areas of India around Bengal, Madras and Bombay.[10] The first years of EIC rule were notorious for their corruption and profiteering, the so-called 'shaking of the pagoda tree', although, as Sudipta Sen notes, even during these years 'a certain species of statehood was being forged', as traders sought to become administrators and develop systems of rule compatible with both their Georgian ideas of political economy and the specific circumstances in India.[11]

With North's Regulating Act (1773), Pitt's India Act (1784) and a series of internal EIC reforms under Governor-General Cornwallis in the 1790s, the EIC was brought under parliamentary supervision and its administration was radically restructured in order to eradicate private corruption and increase the efficiency of its revenue-extracting machine. Although reforms such as the remodelling of the judiciary and the imposition of the Permanent Settlement, which fixed the revenue, took place under the rubric of 'improving' Indian society, they were primarily aimed at facilitating EIC control.[12] Significantly, Sen argues, the formation of the EIC state was not a separate colonial enterprise based solely on indigenous institutions, as is sometimes assumed, but rather involved the reconfiguration of the Georgian state to fit the colonial context, replicating aspects of a political economy that would both facilitate Britain's long-standing pursuit of wealth and ensure her strategic advantage through the exclusion of European political rivals from the subcontinent.[13] Indeed, with the emergence of France as a national and imperial rival during the War of Austrian Succession, the Seven Years War and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and after the loss of the American colonies, India's strategic importance was magnified and her seaboard became crucial to imperial expansion in Asia and Africa.[14]

If the nature of the EIC state was conditioned by national imperatives, the form that colonial society there took was also deeply contingent on specific local conditions. India's large indigenous population and sophisticated social, political and economic institutions made ideas of 'terra nullius' inapplicable and settlement impractical. As a result, the EIC did not achieve the level of control over the resources of land and labour that characterised British settler communities in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Cape and the Caribbean.[15] EIC policies and purpose in India differed substantially from those of the British crown colonies, as India was a 'colony of exploitation' rather than one of settlement.[16] Its value to the EIC lay primarily in the profits that could be made by controlling its internal markets and international trade, appropriating peasant production and, above all, collecting the revenue.[17] Consequently, the EIC was more concerned with taxing the land than with owning or working it. As Peter Marshall points out, EIC control over highly sophisticated indigenous fiscal systems and the enormous revenues that they yielded 'immediately distinguished India from any other contemporary British colonial venture'.[18] They paid for both a large standing army and a sizeable cadre of EIC employees and covenanted civil servants, and allowed these 'sojourners' to work in India rather than settle there. The EIC, as ruler and revenue farmer, was willing to turn a blind eye to the coercive labour practices of taxpaying landlord intermediaries, but had good reason both to avoid allowing taxpaying peasants to be turned into non-taxpaying slaves and to prevent the depopulation and instability caused by extensive and unregulated slave raiding—whether carried out by indigenous slave-dealers, other European powers or renegade British traders.

The importance of the revenue to the EIC state, together with a highly productive system of peasant agriculture, negated the need for European-run slave plantations on the West Indian model.[19] In the West Indies and North America, a critical shortage of free manpower to work the available land necessitated the importation and coercive control of labour.[20] In India, there was a larger and more readily accessible potential workforce, although ideas of the superabundance of Indian landless labour should be treated with caution, as inaccurate simplifications of the pre-colonial, or early colonial, reality. As Michael Anderson points out, in the late eighteenth century there was a pool of mostly low-caste labourers without rights in land, but there were also frequent bitter European complaints about wage demands, unwillingness to work and specific labour shortages.[21] In pre-colonial India, large areas of uncultivated common land allowed peasants to vote with their feet if they were mistreated by landlords or employers.[22] This mostly resulted in higher wages and better conditions, as landlords sought to retain their peasant employees, but in some areas it may have led to coercive methods of controlling labour, such as slavery, debt bondage and corvée. EIC land

policies directly affected labour conditions for the Indian peasantry, and for tribal and nomadic groups. The commercialisation of land rights under the Permanent Settlement and the state's appropriation of common and forest areas made land a scarce resource, tying peasants to their plots, increasing the power of landlord intermediaries over peasant production and leading to the proletisation of tribal groups. As a result, many ordinary cultivating families and tribal communities later resorted to various forms of migrant labour in order to sustain household incomes. The supply of surplus landless labour was sufficient to allow the export of over 1.3 million indentured labourers from India from the 1830s to the 1920s.[23]

In the late eighteenth century, these developments were still in the future, and devastating famines in the 1770s, 1780s and 1790s created concerns about population density, labour availability and the control of human resources. Although the EIC did not import New World systems of chattel slavery to India, it did tap into, and in some cases exacerbate, local systems of forced labour, including one occasion when the authorities explicitly sanctioned the purchase and use of *pulaya* slaves on one of its plantations. In eighteenth-century Madras the EIC sometimes resorted to military force when its demands for unpaid labour exceeded what local elites were willing or able to supply, and armed press gangs recruited labourers for both long- and short-term tasks. Ahuja notes the frequent references to 'pressing coolies' or 'catching coolie carpenters', and suggests that this did not represent the continuation of traditional practices of tribute in labour, but rather transformed it into another form of involuntary labour under a military despotic state.[24] Meanwhile, the EIC government sought to prevent other European powers taking advantage of harsh agricultural conditions and further depopulating its territories by exporting impoverished peasants as slaves to other colonies.

This part of the book deals with EIC attitudes to European slave-trading and slave-holding in India, situating these experiences against the backdrop of EIC state formation just described. The first chapter focuses on official policy regarding European slave-trading in the late eighteenth century, while the second explores the nature of domestic slavery in European homes in the same period. It argues that the EIC saw slave-trafficking as dangerous, because it undermined its control over subject populations, threatened to depopulate territories, destabilise peasant society and subvert its control over both its borders and the bodies of its subjects. Slave-holding, on the other hand, was presented as a static domestic institution, which only exercised the interest of the colonial state when the treatment of slaves overstepped the bounds sanctioned by contemporary ideas of morality, or 'moderate chastisement'. Within this pragmatic dichotomy, however, can be traced more complex and nuanced debates about British imperial identity, and the

moral and political parameters of colonial rule. Humanitarian sentiment was juxtaposed against the expediencies of colonial control, leading to a renegotiation of colonial conceptions of slavery in the Indian context, as emphasis shifted from European activities to indigenous institutions in the early nineteenth century. EIC officials at various levels of the bureaucracy often expressed their personal sentiments, opinions and policy decisions in the language of the metropolitan anti-slavery movement and demonstrated a relatively consistent opposition to chattel slavery as practised in the West Indies, yet within their own territories active interference was limited only to those manifestations of enslavement that threatened colonial stability. Coercive, illegitimate acquisitions through kidnapping or deception, unregulated movement and trade over borders and boundaries and larger-scale exportation and potential depopulation by European slavers elicited EIC intervention, while settled slave systems, including European ownership of domestic slaves, were largely excused, reimagined as qualitatively different from Atlantic slavery, or erased from the colonial record entirely.

Notes

1 For a full discussion of Mansfield's judgement, see William R. Cotter, 'The Somerset Case and the Abolition of Slavery in England', *History* 79.255 (1994): 31–56.
2 Ibid., p. 43.
3 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), p. 1.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 2.
7 Ibid., p. 334.
8 For detailed studies of Indian indentured labour, see Marina Carter, 'Indian Labour Migration to Mauritius and the Indenture Experience, 1834–1874', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1987); Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920* (London: Oxford University Press, for the Institute of Race Relations, 1974).
9 Sudipta Sen, 'Liberal Government and Illiberal Trade: The Political Economy of "Responsible Government" in Early British India', in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 136.
10 For detailed discussion of the processes of EIC territorial expansion, see C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740–1828* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America* c. *1750–1783* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

11 Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

12 On EIC reforms of the judiciary, see Michael Mann, 'Dealing with Oriental Despotism: British Jurisdiction in Bengal, 1772–93', in Harald Fischer-Tiné (ed.), *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004); Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). On the Permanent Settlement, see Nicholas B. Dirks, 'From Little King to Landlord: Property, Law, and the Gift under the Madras Permanent Settlement', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28.2 (1986): 307–33; Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

13 Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, p. 1.

14 Ibid., p. 3.

15 P. J. Marshall, 'The Whites of British India, 1780–1830: A Failed Colonial Society?' *International History Review* 12.1 (1990): 28.

16 Ibid., p. 29.

17 For a detailed discussion of EIC integration into Indian markets and commerce, see Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

18 Marshall, 'The Whites of British India', p. 27.

19 Ibid., p. 28.

20 Howard Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 173.

21 Michael Anderson, 'India, 1858–1930: The Illusion of Free Labor', in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 424.

22 David Washbrook, 'India in the Early Modern World Economy: Modes of Production, Reproduction and Exchange', *Journal of Global History* 2.1 (2007): 87–111.

23 For an accessible overview of the detrimental impacts of EIC land policy, see Crispin Bates, *Subalterns and Raj: South Asia since 1600* (London: Routledge, 2007).

24 Ravi Ahuja, 'Labour Relations in an Early Colonial Context: Madras, *c.*1750–1800', *Modern Asian Studies* 36.4 (2002): 802.

2

'A Shameful and Ruinous Trade': European Slave-trafficking and the East India Company

The involvement of European chartered trading companies and private entrepreneurs in purchasing, owning and trafficking Indian slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been largely been overshadowed, at the time and since, by the European imperial nations' more intensive and notorious activities in the Atlantic. As Richard B. Allen points out, histories of the French, Dutch and British East India Companies make scant reference to their involvement in slave-trading, and studies that address the incorporation of Indian slaves as items of commerce or sources of labour for European mercantilism and empire-building are rare.[1] When acknowledged at all, slavery in colonial India is usually presented as an indigenous institution, whose roots were deeply embedded in local social, cultural and religious custom, rather than European commercial, mercantilist or capitalist networks.[2] This dissociation between Indian forms of slavery and European colonial practice is not new, of course: in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain the assumption was that 'chattel slavery either did not exist in India, or only existed in a limited degree which hardly concerned white men'.[3] Thus, Indian slavery has been distanced from colonial society and commerce, and located instead within traditional, pre-colonial Indian economies of domestic and agricultural production. In the process, both the transformative impact that colonialism had on these 'traditional' structures and the connection between European slave-trading and wider histories of European imperial expansion have been elided.[4] Yet, European commerce in Indian slaves was integral to the development of colonial societies in the Indian Ocean, and was connected to wider networks of trade and empire around the world.[5] There is ample, if frustratingly unquantifiable, evidence of European complicity in slave-trafficking around the region. Indeed, EIC records relating to slavery in both the Bengal and Madras Presidencies in the

late eighteenth century deal primarily with European, rather than Indian, slave-trading.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europeans of various nationalities exported Indian slaves to their colonies in South-East Asia, the Mascarenes, the Cape and elsewhere. South India saw a lively commerce in slaves, while coastal regions of Bengal, and especially Arakan, were also subject to slave raiding by Europeans and their agents. Compared to the Atlantic trade, numbers were relatively small, but this does not mean that they were insignificant, being large enough to induce the Mughal state, smaller local Indian kingdoms and the British EIC to attempt to limit the trade and prevent the depopulation of their territories.[6] This trade was strategically important to the European powers who undertook it, as it provided a major source of labour for their eastern outposts. Marcus Vink argues that slavery was a defining feature of seventeenth-century Dutch Indian Ocean colonies, including their headquarters in Batavia and their South Asian settlements of Cochin and Colombo, while later Indian slaves also represented a significant proportion of labourers in the French Mascarenes. Unlike the Atlantic Ocean, however, where European colonial powers were able to impose their own system in a relative vacuum, in the Indian Ocean they were forced to tap into and negotiate with existing slaving networks in order to supply the labour demands of their colonies.[7] The Dutch VOC, unofficial Portuguese traders operating from Chittagong, armed Magh pirates and the Taung-ngu rulers of Arakan formed various alliances to carry out slave raids in the coastal regions of Bengal, while significant numbers of slaves were also captured and exported from India's Malabar and Coromandel coasts.[8] In the latter region, supplies fluctuated in line with natural and man-made disasters—a trend that would continue until the end of the eighteenth century. Vink pinpoints five main booms in the seventeenth-century Coromandel trade, and notes that the Dutch exported between 2,000 and 10,000 people to Batavia and Ceylon on each of these occasions, while English traders exploited another famine in 1688 to export 665 slaves from Fort St George (Madras).[9] EIC records suggest that European slave-trafficking continued along India's eastern seaboard throughout the eighteenth century, with European traders utilising local networks of procurement manned by Indians and what the EIC termed 'low Europeans'—Portuguese and Armenians. These intermediaries linked local patterns of enslavement to the seagoing European trade, and thus to wider imperial networks that channelled Indian slave labour to colonies further afield. As with the seventeenth-century Dutch trade, in the eighteenth century, Europeans and their intermediaries exploited periods of dearth to procure large numbers of slaves on easy terms, but many also employed

coercion, violence and deception to maintain their cargos in less straightened times.

European slave-trading along India's coasts did not go uncontested in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries; it often led the colonial powers into conflict with regional potentates and regimes. Most major Indian powers resisted the export of slaves, whether by European slavers or other external groups, as 'an intolerable loss of the country's most precious resource and a violation of the collective moral code of society'.[10] Both the Marathas in the west and the Nayaka rulers in the south opposed European slaving activities, while the Mughals also tried to prevent European traders enslaving people within their borders.[11] The latter used Portuguese slaving activities as a pretext to expel them from Hugli in 1632, and when they conquered the port of Chittagong in 1666 they drove Arakanese slave raiders out of parts of Bengal, severely damaging the Dutch trade.[12] Despite these moves, however, the *Calcutta Review* could note that, as late as 1760, Budge Budge, near Akra, was 'infested by slave ships belonging to the Mugs [Maghs] and Portuguese'. It cited the *East India Chronicle* of 1758 as saying,

> February 1717, the Mugs carried off from the most Southern parts of Bengal 1800 men, women and children, in ten days they landed at Arracan [*sic*] and were conducted before the sovereign, who chose the handicraftsmen, about one-fourth of their number, as his slaves. The remainder were returned to their captors with ropes about their necks[, taken] to market, and sold according to their strength from 20 to 70 rupees each … Almost three-fourths of the inhabitants of Arracan are said to be natives of Bengal or descendants of such who pray that the English may deliver them, and they have agreed among themselves to assist their deliverers. From time immemorial the Mugs have plundered the Southern parts of Bengal … destroy[ing] what they could not carry away, and carry[ing] the inhabitants into slavery. But since the cession of the province to the Company, the place for the most part has enjoyed quiet.[13]

Thus, even before the formal beginning of their territorial rule in Bengal in 1765, British sources were constructing the EIC as a civilising presence that brought peace and order to areas under its influence by suppressing the predations of plunderers and slave raiders from other nations. Such self-representations were, of course, at odds both with the EIC's own earlier involvement in the trade and with the now notorious activities of many individual EIC servants in India in the mid-eighteenth century, which were thought by the 1770s to have increased rather than decreased slave-trading. The *East India Chronicle*'s interpretation of events may, however, reflect early tendencies, more obvious after 1772, to settle frontier regions and to reimagine the EIC as a legitimate and benevolent ruler.

'Illegal trafficks': the East India Company and European slave-trading in India

Legislation brought into force by the EIC after the formalisation of its government under Governor-General Warren Hastings in 1772, together with records of prosecutions brought under that legislation, suggest that slave-trading was rife in both the Bengal and Madras Presidencies until the end of the eighteenth century. 'The practice of stealing children from their parents, and selling them for slaves, has long prevailed in this country,' a minute by the Governor-General noted in 1774, 'and has greatly increased since the establishment of English Government in it.'[14] On that basis, the government of Bengal passed Regulations 9 and 10 of 1774, which removed the right to trade in persons *without a written deed* and prevented the sale or purchase of any individual *not already in a state of slavery*. These laws were clearly not intended to affect European or Indian buying, selling or holding of existing, properly documented slaves, who had 'become a just property by purchase antecedent to the proposed prohibition'.[15] Rather, they were intended to limit slave raiding and prevent the export of formerly free individuals by other European powers. They were passed because it was deemed necessary to 'prevent hasty strides towards depopulation' (a reference, perhaps, to the recent effects of the Bengal famine of 1770, in which up to one-third of the population is estimated to have perished) and 'halt the savage commerce, by which numbers of children are conveyed out of the country on the Dutch and especially the French vessels'.[16] Guilt for the trade was thus displaced onto the EIC's European rivals, but the EIC government did admit that British rule had exacerbated the problem. In an indirect acknowledgement of the dubious practices of the preceding decade, Hastings noted that 'The Influence derived from the English name to every man whose birth, language, or even habit, entitles him to assume a share of its privileges, and the neglect of the judicious precautions established by the ancient law of the country … has greatly facilitated this savage commerce.'[17] The untrammelled power of EIC officials in the region, and their disregard for traditional safeguards and responsibilities of rulers, were, it was feared, being exploited by other European nations to facilitate profiteering from the slave trade. The 1774 regulation against the unauthorised transfer of slaves was thus partly a response to a problem of the EIC's own making: one aspect of the wider process of cleaning up various 'illegal trafficks', such as corrupt and coercive private trade, which were responsible for 'bloodshed, massacres and confusion' in EIC territories and which undermined the EIC's growing desire to be regarded as a legitimate ruler.[18]

Despite the EIC government's early recognition of the problem of European slave-trading, the 1774 legislation was not particularly successful,

or well enforced. In 1785, Mr Day, the Collector at Dacca, reported that a trade in slaves had been established by 'low Portuguese' in Dacca, Calcutta, Chinsurah and elsewhere.[19] Two years later, in August 1787, EIC superintendents of police Thomas Motte and Edward Maxwell informed the Governor-General that they had uncovered twenty child slaves, aged between six and fourteen years, awaiting export to the 'French Islands' of Mauritius and Reunion.[20] In December of that year, they reported that they had sent a further thirty-three recovered girls and boys to the care of the Collector at Dacca, for return to their parents.[21] In 1789, the orientalist scholar and EIC judge Sir William Jones commented critically upon the 'large boats filled with such children, coming down the river for open sale at Calcutta', adding that 'most of them were stolen from their parents, or bought, perhaps for a measure of rice in times of scarcity', and that 'the sale itself is in defiance of this government, by violating one of its positive orders'.[22] The same year, Governor-General Lord Cornwallis, in a letter to the Court of Directors in London, reported that 'an infamous traffic has, it seems, long been carried on in this country by the low Portuguese, and even by several foreign seafaring people and traders, in purchasing and collecting native children in a clandestine manner, and exporting them for sale to the French Islands and other parts of India.'[23]

As a result of the above-mentioned cases, the legislation of 1774 was reissued by proclamation in 1789, and trading in slaves, as carried on by 'many natives and a few Europeans', was outlawed again.[24] A reward of 100 rupees was offered for anyone giving information leading to the discovery of slave-trading activity, to be paid on the conviction of the guilty parties before the Supreme Court, with an additional 50 rupees offered for every person, male or female, who should be freed from slavery as a result. Cornwallis also called upon commercial houses and private merchants to do everything in their power to prevent the traffic by ensuring that it was not carried on by the commanders of their vessels. No English pilot would be given to a vessel carrying slaves, or expected of intending to do so, and if a native pilot took on such a vessel he would have his licence revoked and the offence registered. Anyone found violating the order, Cornwallis assured the Court of Directors, would meet with 'the most exemplary punishment'.[25] This included expulsion from EIC territories, although those Europeans prosecuted for slave-trading in the late eighteenth century rarely suffered such serious sanctions, and punishments were usually confined to a warning, a fine or a couple of months' imprisonment. Indians caught participating in the export trade, on the other hand, could expect to face lengthy prison sentences, have their boats confiscated and be publicly flogged.[26] The Bengal proclamation of 1789 was followed by a similar one in Madras in 1790. Like the Bengal authorities, the Madras government justified intervention

on the grounds that it was necessary to prevent a practice 'so detrimental to the country and so injurious to the rights of humanity' and offered a reward of 20 pagodas for the discovery of every offender and 10 pagodas for each person delivered from slavery as a result.[27] The Bombay government passed a similar regulation in 1805.

'Hasty strides towards depopulation': famine, distress sales and slave-trafficking

Despite the legislation of 1774, 1789 and 1790, and the active attempts of some EIC officials to prevent the exportation of slaves from their territories, illegal cases of European slave-trafficking off India's eastern seaboard continued. Cargoes of slaves, ranging from a handful of individuals to 500 or 600 enslaved men, women and children, were uncovered on boats belonging to individuals of various nationalities well into the 1790s. Perhaps the most notorious (although by no means the only) case was that of Peter Horrebow, a Danish captain of a country vessel sailing and trading under English colours, who was tried in July 1789 for 'procuring and carrying hence ... one hundred and fifty unhappy children' from Bengal and selling them as slaves in Ceylon. Witnesses from the crew of the *Charlotte*, another British vessel in port in Colombo at the time, reported that the slaves comprised men, women and children as young as five or six years of age, and that all 'had the appearance of being in wretchedness and poverty'. Horrebow was prosecuted for contravening the 1774 legislation, and, when found guilty, was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, fined 500 rupees and ordered to provide a security for his good behaviour for three years, to the sum of 5,000 rupees.[28] Horrebow's trial, which was presided over by Sir William Jones himself, was widely reported in the press—the *Bengal Journal* and *Calcutta Gazette* both followed it—and caused quite a stir.[29]

Horrebow claimed that he had been unaware of the 1774 legislation, arguing that the trade in slaves was long established and that he had seen slaves sold publicly by auction in Calcutta.[30] His main line of defence, however, was that becoming slaves had materially improved the circumstances of those he transported. He truly believed, he asserted, that the slaves he had sold at Colombo preferred that situation to remaining in India, because 'a great number of them were nearly starved' when they came on board his vessel. He had, he claimed, treated them with 'all possible humanity and kindness', and far from being badly provisioned on board many had died 'as a result to their eating too voraciously'.[31] The idea that enslavement could act as a mechanism to save individuals and families from starvation was repeated by several other European slave-traders and became a prominent

trope in debates around slave-trafficking, as those accused of carrying out the trade sought to recast themselves as compassionate philanthropists, rather than mercenary venture capitalists.

Although Horrebow's self-projected image as benevolent rescuer is deeply problematic, there was a clear correlation between famines and spikes in European slave-trading in both Bengal and Madras Presidencies. Mr Day, the EIC representative in Dacca, reported that the sudden increase in slave-trading in his region in 1785 was the direct result of ongoing agricultural dearth, which had reduced the local inhabitants to 'the lowest pitch of misery and distress'. High prices and severe want of grain had resulted, he reported, in 'many hundreds, I might say thousands, of unhappy wretches … lying on the banks of the Burrumpoter [*sic*], some in the agonies of death and others emaciated by famine, with hardly the strength to crawl along, imploring the assistance of passengers'. He added that because the 'poor creatures reduced to skeletons' were incapable of manual labour, they were unable to afford what little grain was available and had been reduced to selling their children to secure a subsistence. Boats travelling from Dacca to Calcutta were 'loaded with children of all ages' and Day reported that he had posted men at the outlets of the river to stem the traffic, and ordered a search of the town. He uncovered and released forty-two children, aged between two and six years, who, he noted, were 'objects the most striking, and can barely be said to have life'. These he hoped to return to their families, asking his superiors to offer them 'any further assistance your Board may feel necessary'.[32] The government's reply, given in September that year, approved of his actions, noting that as grain was once again plentiful there was no reason to fear the traffic's continuance.[33] In September 1787, however, the *Calcutta Gazette* reported that excessive rains had caused flooding and renewed famine. 'A crowd of poor wretches resort to the city', reported the newspaper, 'where the importation from distant countries has afforded some relief. I am told parents sell their children as slaves for a few Rupees, an incontrovertible proof of extreme misery and want'.[34] A similar famine in the Ganjam district of the Madras Presidency in 1790–1 also caused an increase in slave-trading there, leading Governor Charles Oakley to worry that want of food would prompt more parents to sell their children and to direct the district officer there to explore the possibility preventing this by of feeding children at the public expense.[35] He further elaborated the connection between famine and slave-trading in a letter to the Court of Directors in 1793, noting that,

> whilst a severe famine prevailed, and the wretched inhabitants were equally anxious with the purchasers for the continuance of a commerce so disgraceful, we could hardly expect that our utmost endeavours would be effectual; but as this calamity became less grievous, our hopes of success were

> more flattering, and we doubted not that the practice would very shortly cease altogether.[36]

The relationship between famine, distress sales and perpetual bondage was to become a recurrent theme in colonial discourse on Indian slavery. The idea that Indian peasants entered slavery voluntarily in times of hardship resonated with emerging orientalist tropes about the inherent passivity, indolence and lack of entrepreneurial spirit that supposedly characterised Hindus; traits that were thought to naturally predispose them to both individual and collective subordination.[37] The apparent poverty of the Indian peasantry was exacerbated by an unpredictable environment and an exploitative, despotic Mughal state, rendering them helpless victims of tyrannical rulers, a capricious climate and their own lack of industry. The growing influence of these ideas in the late eighteenth century marked a shift in European interpretations of Indian conditions. As David Arnold notes, during the Enlightenment, the fertility of Indian soil, the abundance of its natural products and the skill of its artisans had contributed to its reputation as a wealthy and favoured location. Under EIC rule, however, a new image emerged that emphasised both its moral degradation and its material poverty; a land that, unlike the West, was not sufficiently developed to control the vagaries of nature. This idea was reinforced, if not actually created, by the terrible Bengal famine of 1770, in which up to ten million people are thought to have died.[38] European descriptions of this famine are harrowing. Thousands left their homes in search of food and the dead and dying littered the streets of urban centres such as Calcutta, Murshidabad and Patna. One anonymous writer reported that 'I have counted from my bedchamber window in the morning when I got up, forty bodies lying within twenty yards of the wall, besides many hundreds lying in the agonies of death for want, bending double with their stomachs quite close contracted to their backbones.'[39] Under these conditions people did whatever they needed to survive, eating their seed corn and selling the ploughs and bullocks that they would need for future cultivation and subsisting on grass, bark and leaves. Rumours circulated that the living even fed on the dead. Parents sold their children in the hopes of securing provision for them and enough money for themselves to survive a little longer, or gave them away to any who would undertake to support them. Arnold points out that many children only survived the famine by becoming slaves in European or Indian households, a pattern which was repeated in later famines.[40] Sir William Jones, noting this practice in 1789, commented that many of these domestic slaves had been 'saved perhaps from a death that might have been fortunate, for a life that seldom fails of being miserable'.[41] Others, as we have seen, clung on to life at the expense of being exported as slave labour to distant European colonies.

EIC officials were indignant that other European nations should exploit times of dearth by trafficking in slaves; officials in Masaulipatam in 1792, for example, called the idea of individuals enriching themselves as a result of the famine 'depraved'.[42] Only two decades earlier, however, EIC officials had been accused of exacerbating the 1770 famine by their mismanagement and their obsession with maintaining levels of revenue collection. The decades immediately preceding the famine had seen the notorious 'rape of Bengal' as the EIC and its employees ruthlessly exploited its newfound privileges to extract as much collective and individual wealth as possible.[43] Lord Clive, himself one of the guilty parties, admitted in 1765 that there had been unparalleled scenes of 'anarchy, confusion, bribery, corruption and extortion' and that rarely had such huge fortunes been made 'in so unjust and so rapacious a manner'.[44] In the wake of the famine the Court of Directors asked the Governor-General to investigate claims that the EIC had contributed to the disaster by monopolising the grain market, and, while no Britons were ever prosecuted for this, it was suggested that excessive tax demands had squeezed every spare *anna* from the Bengali economy, leaving the population ill-prepared for times of hardship, and undermining traditional systems of support and relief. In the wake of the 1770 crisis, and the slightly less severe one around Dacca in 1784–5, referred to above, British officials began to seek ways of averting future crises, building public granaries and botanic gardens into which new species of food plant could be introduced. Sir Joseph Banks, writing in 1787, believed that as a result future generations of Indians would 'revere the names of their British conquerors to whom they will be indebted for the abolition of famine, the most severe scourge with which nature has afflicted the country'.[45] Indian vulnerability to such devastating famines appeared to reinforce the need for European intervention, for, although they remained extremely susceptible to the tropical climate and diseases, EIC officials believed fervently that European agricultural technologies and scientific knowledge gave them superior mastery over nature and the productivity of the soil and that Indians were dependent on 'European energy and resolve to rescue them from the material and moral consequences of their own passivity'.[46] An early articulation of 'civilising mission', these ideas, like EIC interventions to feed hungry children and prevent the trafficking of famine victims, also reflected EIC attempts to legitimise its rule by accepting the traditional duty of Indian rulers to care for those temporarily unable to care for themselves and to restore their reputation for benevolence at home, which had been severely damaged by their apparent failings in 1770.[47]

Whatever symbolic use was made of the EIC's role in defending its inhabitants against famine, its actual actions fell far short of the needs of the country, allowing discourses of famine relief to be appropriated by individuals

to justify the incorporation of a famished child into a European household, or the exportation of starving peasants to distant slave colonies. The 'decision' of some impoverished Indian families to secure their own, or their children's, survival by selling themselves into slavery complicated EIC officials' opposition to the slave trade, juxtaposing their humanitarian claims against those of slave-traders, who argued that in the absence of effective state intervention they offered a form of individual famine relief. C. L. Eilbraert, the Dutch factor at Pulicat, noted ironically that the EIC's prohibition of slave-trading would be more efficacious if they would 'provide the natives all over the country with victuals', adding that peasants' choice of 'slavery rather than a certain death' could not be censured.[48] Some EIC officials on the ground acknowledged the appalling conditions in which hungry Indian families were placed, but most opposed the idea that slavery was a legitimate alternative to starvation, and sought to return trafficked children to their families. In April 1790, for example, Morgan Williams, the EIC agent at Ganjam, was asked to return thirty-two rescued slaves to their families, or to 'procure service, or afford a present subsistence for such of them as may be unable to gain a livelihood, or have not friends to support them'.[49]

The sale of children was difficult to reconcile with eighteenth-century ideas of filial and parental affection, the importance of the biological family as the basic unit of society and the 'belief that childhood was a time of innocence during which children should be nurtured in families'.[50] Indian parents' willingness to part with their children cast doubt upon affective bonds and reinforced ideas of their essential 'otherness'. James Forbes, in his *Oriental Memoirs*, for example, noted that 'astonishing' numbers came to the Malabar port of Anjengo to sell themselves, or their children as slaves. 'During my residence at Anjengo there was no famine', he reported,

> nor any unusual shortage of grain, but during the rainy season many were weekly brought down from the mountains to be sold on the coast. They did not appear to think it so great a hardship as we imagine; what may be their usual degree of filial and parental affection I pretend not to determine … but, without the smallest intention of countenancing West Indian slavery, I must and do think the feelings of a Malabar peasant and those of a cottage family in England are very different; the former certainly part with their children apparently with very little compunction, the latter are united by every tender and sympathetic tie.[51]

In a similar vein, Charles Grant, in his *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*, written in 1792, gave the following account:

> In the scarcity of grain which prevailed about Calcutta in the year 1788, a gentleman then high, now still higher in office there, ordered his servants to buy any children that might be brought for sale, (for in these times of dearth Hindoo parents frequently sell their offspring), and to tell their mothers, that when the scarcity should be over, they might come again and receive their children back. Of about twenty thus humanly preserved, most of whom were females, only three were ever enquired after by their mothers. The scarcity was neither extreme nor long. The unnatural parents cannot be supposed to have perished from want, for each received money for her child, and by the liberal contribution of the inhabitants of Calcutta, and chiefly of the Europeans, rice was distributed daily at various stations about the city. And yet notwithstanding this facility of obtaining food, a woman was at that time seen, in broad day, to throw away her infant child upon the high road. Most of the slaves in Hindostan (where they are used only for domestic services) have lost their freedom by the act of their parents. If the necessity is such at times as to lead to this expedient, is it not also an occasion to call forth the warmth of parental affection? Filial and paternal affection appear equally deficient among them.[52]

Allen suggests that Grant's comments on slavery reflect his humanitarian concern with the welfare of children and indicate the mindset of EIC officials regarding slavery and abolition.[53] Grant was a high-ranking EIC official, who on returning to London became both an active abolitionist and an influential EIC director. Noting that before he left India, in 1792, Grant was a valued adviser to Cornwallis, Allen speculates about the influence he may have had on Cornwallis's policy on slavery and slave-trafficking in 1789, as well as that which he may have wielded over the Court of Directors between 1794 and 1813, when the EIC considered further anti-slave-trading measures not only in India (in 1811), but also in Ceylon in 1800 and Prince of Wales Island in 1805.[54] Grant's treatment of slavery in *Observations* was ambivalent, however. The essay itself, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, was written to persuade EIC Directors of the need to evangelise India and deliberately emphasised Indian social and religious degradation. Grant is more concerned with Indian religious and moral degeneracy than with conditions of bondage, and detailed discussions of slavery are conspicuously absent from his text. When mentioned, it is in the context of other Indian issues, like caste, the 'Hindoo code', Indian sexual immorality, or, as above, the Indian mother's unnatural lack of parental affection. He shows little concern with labour conditions in India, but does use metaphors of enslavement to indicate the Hindus' collective socio-religious oppression, a rhetorical device that actually conceals the plight of individual chattel slaves. Moreover, his use of famine sales to critique Indians' lack of familial affection and explore the possibility of 'benevolent' British intervention

to take in famished children may have had personal resonances for Grant, whose own brother, Robert, had a long-standing conjugal relationship with a slave purchased from her improvident uncle.[55] We can only speculate on the way in which such hidden family histories may have coloured his understanding of typical routes into, and experiences of, slavery for Indian women and children.

In purchasing cargoes of impoverished Indian peasants, European slave-traders argued that they were simply tapping into accepted 'traditional' Indian practices in which enslavement acted as a social safety net, allowing the better off to both give support to and benefit from the destitute. EIC Chaplain, Revd William Tennant, writing in 1798, for example, noted of local Indian custom that

> many persons either from being deserted by their relations, or by the death of their parents, are cast destitute upon the public; such unfortunates, like lost goods, become the property of the finder. If, during a famine, a person has been fed by another, and his life by that means preserved, such become the property of those who entertained him.[56]

'Many acquisitions of this nature might have been made by Europeans', he added, 'had their customs authorised the practice.'[57] In fact, many such acquisitions were made by Europeans, and justified on the grounds of existing customs. European slave-traders thus appropriated ideas of Indian 'tradition' to justify commercially motivated transactions, normalising their action even as they profiteered out of human misery. A group of 'foreign merchants' caught trafficking slaves by the Madras government in 1790, for example, claimed to have rescued their cargo from famine in the Ganjam area. 'Everyone disposed of their children for want of food to live on,' they asserted; 'the inhabitants of the country brought and sold the said children, whom we maintained and nourished as our own sons; and … shipped them in our said vessels.' The repeated emphasis on the children's treatment 'as our own sons' resonates with the idea that feeding and clothing could create bonds of kinship between strangers, and masks an exploitative and coercive trade with the language of familial obligation. The merchants also invoked the EIC's failure to disburse famine relief, expressing concern for the future welfare of the children on the basis that 'during the time they were with us, they had the happiness of enjoying and eating good bread, and now they are destined to live on light food'.[58]

Impoverished labourers and peasants were, of course, more likely to bind themselves to employers, or creditors, in times of hardship than in those of prosperity. As Ravi Ahuja points out, the sums received in lieu of lifelong enslavement were sometimes barely sufficient to maintain families for more

than a few days, especially in times of soaring grain prices, suggesting more complex relationships of dependence and obligation. 'Labour costs' were naturally lower in periods of severe want, but sums as low as one or two pagodas in return for long-term or even perpetual bondage suggest that a 'guarantee of maintenance' was more important than the loan itself.[59] As Dharma Kumar has observed, in times of scarcity, 'an obligation to work could be construed as a right to employment'.[60] Entry into slavery could thus be a strategy for short- and long-term survival, while famine created a pool of surplus labour that could be acquired on extremely oppressive terms. Whatever the pretensions of European traders, however, trafficking Indian slaves to distant colonies was a very different proposition from local Indian arrangements. Not only did export overseas, or to other parts of India, involve potentially permanent spatial removal from locality and kin, but European conceptions of absolute ownership over chattel slaves, and the accompanying 'social death' of the enslaved, was at odds with Indian patterns of obligation and bondage. Governor Oakley explained the difference between local Indian relationships of dependence and the European acquisition of famine victims, saying,

> the laws of the country do not allow any such practice as the purchase of slaves for exportation. Under the pressure of famine even, they only say that 'whoever has received victuals from a person during a time of such calamity, hath become his slave; on giving two head of cattle to the provider, may become free from his servitude'.[61]

Slaves who bonded their labour in a local context retained the possibility of later renegotiating their status. This is not to imply that relationships between local creditors and bonded labourers were always harmonious; as Ravi Ahuja notes, masters sometimes used coercive measures to maintain their control over those enslaved during times of famine, especially when prosperity returned and livelihoods were more easily available elsewhere.[62] Individuals purchased by Europeans and shipped to slavery overseas, on the other hand, had no knowledge of the conditions to which they were going and no opportunity subsequently to renegotiate their status, buy their freedom or return to their kin. Whatever the circumstance under which parents parted with their children, or sold themselves into slavery, the relief from famine afforded by European slave-traders was likely, as Oakley put it, to be 'at best feeble, partial, and of the most miserable kind; it may prolong the existence of wretchedness for a time, but not without aggravating that misery which it effects to remove.'[63]

'A savage commerce': conditions of the European slave trade in India

European slave-traders' humanitarian pretentions contrast sharply with the glimpses we have of the conditions that the enslaved subsequently suffered at their hands. The disjuncture between the philanthropic rhetoric of famine relief and the darker reality of how slaves were acquired, treated and disposed of is well illustrated by the case of Andrew Perry, a Briton arraigned for slave-trafficking along the Coromandel Coast in 1790. Perry was accused of kidnapping about thirty women and children at 'Jaggernaut-puram' (now Puri), near Ganjam, with the intention of selling them as slaves, and of 'improperly treating them' by denying them adequate supplies. Perry admitted taking the women and children on board his boats and bringing them to Masaulipatam, but, like the abovementioned 'foreign merchants', attributed his actions, 'however irregular … in some particulars', to compassionate rather than mercenary motives. A famine had raged in the district 'with uncommon fury', he claimed, 'the dreadful effects of which were but too visible; humanity shuddered at the sight; nor could the most unfeeling have refused the strong impulse that your petitioner certainly felt on this occasion, of affording all the assistance in his power to distress so truly pitiable.' With this benevolent aim apparently in view, he sent his agent with money to assist those most in need. The agent, however, returned with several children, who he had purchased from impoverished parents. Perry claimed that his sole intention was to convey them to a more prosperous place, where they might find their livelihoods. This means of bettering their situations, he argued, 'had been a practice perfectly congenial to their customs and wishes, and always adopted on these occasions'. Leaving Ganjam, Perry did not scruple to 'take more of those unhappy wretches under his protection, who willingly engaged to embark' with him and 'seek that subsistence elsewhere that their own country had denied them'. He noted that many other vessels at the port were doing the same. His ultimate intention, he maintained, was to get them into service with someone who would both support them and reimburse him for the cost of their acquisition and subsistence.[64]

Perry's self-representation as benevolent humanitarian, delivering helpless Indian women and children from starvation, is destabilised by the deposition of his Indian crewman, Lal Chand, who gave a very different account of events. Chand was originally hired to sail one of Perry's two vessels, but he was later also given charge of the slaves. He told the Madras authorities that the children had been taken against their will, lured to the port with promises of food and clothes, before being forcibly taken captive. They had then been kept confined in the home of a local arrack farmer for twenty or thirty days while Perry went away on business. Lal Chand claimed that he had been given just one rupee to pay for supplies and, as a result, though he

had taken to begging for their subsistence, two children had died from lack of food and water. On Perry's return the surviving slaves were forced onto the boats, which then set sail, with the order not to stop at any port and to anchor out at sea if necessary. Even when they ran short of supplies, resulting in the death of at least seven more slaves, Perry would not let them put into port, presumably fearing that the nature of his cargo would be discovered. Lal Chand's account thus suggests that Perry was a man carefully planning what he knew to be an illegal commerce and taking steps to avoid detection, whatever the resulting suffering of the slaves.[65]

Lal Chand's account was corroborated by many of the surviving slaves, although Perry claimed that the accusations had been 'industriously fabricated' against him, attributing this to the 'natural antipathy and vicious inclination' of 'the native'.[66] The EIC officials dealing with the case believed that there was 'too much reason for supposing that compulsive measures were used in carrying the unfortunate natives on board' and, from the numbers that died, 'that they were improperly treated during the passage'. They also assumed, however, that Perry was unaware of the 1790 proclamation against slave-trafficking (although if this was the case his evasive actions make little sense) and that, given the nature of the evidence, a jury might not find a verdict against him. On this basis they decided to release him with a reprimand that would make him 'sensible of the lenity observed towards [him], as also of the heinousness of the allegations against him', warning him that if he committing a second offence he would 'be punished to the utmost rigour of the law, and sent by the first conveyance to England'.[67]

Perry's case and others like it suggest that, although the EIC, European slave-traders and subsequent historians have portrayed the Indian/Indian Ocean slave trade as qualitatively different from its Atlantic counterpart, kidnap, coercion, natal alienation, harsh treatment and high mortality rates in transport could be common themes of the slave experience in both contexts. Some desperate adults may have sold themselves and their children but others were stolen, duped, tricked or otherwise taken against their will, and violent slave raiding activities took place in various parts of India. In 1792, for example, fifty sepoys entered a contract with one Mr Fairlie to serve the King of Acheen for three years. In return for their service they received a cash advance, a promise of food and decent wages and, importantly, a guarantee that they would be relieved and returned home after a three-year tour of duty. On arriving in Acheen, however, they were informed that they were slaves, 250 rupees each having been paid for them to the ship's captain, Quinn, who had sailed away secretly in the night. After suffering mistreatment, warfare and hardship, eight of the sepoys escaped on British vessels bound for Bengal. Once back in their native land, they patiently but persistently petitioned the local EIC authorities for redress, and for the

release of their compatriots, who were still enslaved in Acheen. They would, they argued, rather have 'submitted to beggary in this country' than have knowingly sold themselves into slavery overseas.[68]

Still more coercive modes of acquisition were used by Monsieur St Croix, a Frenchman who was found offering a group of Andaman Islanders for sale in Calcutta in 1790. By his own account, he had been searching the Andaman Islands for birds' nests when he came upon four or five Andamanese in a canoe and immediately 'resolved to attempt to get possession of them'. The man in the canoe 'made a stout resistance, and was not secured until he was wounded and knocked down', but, eventually, he, a pregnant woman and two boys were carried onto St Croix's boat. The next day a large party of Andamanese in boats came and attempted to rescue their compatriots. St Croix killed two with his own gun, and later lamented 'that his people were poltroons, for had they been men of spirit, he could have caught a great number of them'. His original plan was to sell the captured Andamanese, use the money to buy a larger boat and then return to the islands 'to procure a cargo of Caffrees, that would sell exceedingly well at the French islands.' In an interesting twist, however, when St Croix landed at Rangoon the King of Ava (Burma), who claimed sovereignty over the Andaman Islands, seized members of his crew, arguing that he had as much right to steal St Croix's sailors as the Frenchman had to take the Andamanese. St Croix refused to relinquish the Andamanese, and, when he met Captain Francis Light in Calcutta in 1790, to whom he related this tale, was looking for money from their sale to free his own crew. Light, having gained permission to purchase them, offered St Croix 3,000 rupees a piece for the Andamanese, but the Frenchman would not take less than 6,000 rupees a head.[69]

In addition to voluntary sale and violent slave raiding, there were also more-complex networks of procurement established to supply European demands for Indian slaves. In 1791, a Frenchman called Jourdain was arrested for slave-trafficking between Calcutta and Pondicherry. In his defence, Jourdain claimed that he had been given charge of the slaves by their individual French owners, on whose behalf he was to sell them. 'The greatest part of them', he maintained, 'belong to unfortunate people, whose necessities made them send them to Pondicherry.'[70] The slaves were thus presented as private property that was being transferred in a legitimate manner, rather than the victims of illicit raiding who were being illegally exported. The short biographies of these slaves noted down by British officials, however, suggest that, while some had been sold directly by French owners, others had longer and more traumatic histories of kidnap, enslavement and transfer by family members, bawds, pimps and procurers. Far from being private sales by distressed French individuals, most of the children had been systematically collected by a procurer named Petit Jaun, who the local EIC agent at

Kedgeree described as 'a well known character in the line of obtaining and conveying away many helpless children from this country'.[71] The testimonies of children released from the *Hero* in Calcutta in 1789 provide similar evidence of coercive or deceitful modes of acquisition. These children were freed after a woman approached the marine office claiming that her son Jumon had been inveigled onto the boat and was being held there against his will, along with several other girls and boys of various ages. On interviewing the children, the police officer found that 'some of them were evidently taken improperly; others went willingly and did not complain'. Fourteen-year-old coolie Ioomun, for example, was sent on board to deliver a load of fish and then prevented from disembarking because 'wages' for him had been paid to his parents. This his father strongly denied, but his mother admitted to receiving two rupees, which had been spent on clothes, and to have agreed to take three and a half rupees per month for her son. That Ioomun was completely ignorant of these arrangements is a stark indicator of the pain and confusion that must have been caused when parents sold their children, for whatever reason. Of the other children, Harroo, Rishmee and Reshumer were all beggars in the bazaar. Reshumer claimed to have been seduced on board, as did Obda, the fatherless daughter of a spinning woman, and Utta, who stated that the ship's serang had promised to marry her. Saheboden had been caught stealing cowries in the bazaar and was given to the slavers by the police. Badoolah, an embroiderer, claimed that he was kidnapped. The accused slavers argued that these supposedly destitute children had asked to be taken on board, although at least six of them claimed to have been coerced or tricked in some way. Badoolah, in particular, strongly contested the suggestion that he was in need, claiming that he was gainfully employed and received four rupees a month plus provisions from his employer.[72]

Stories of coercion and deception can also be found in the Madras records. After the British EIC clamped down on the trade in the early 1790s, and as famine in the region receded, traders were forced to adopt more secretive and coercive methods to maintain their slave cargoes. After British troops were stationed in the Yanam (Yanaon) region, the French began moving slaves in small parties at night to avoid detection, only uniting these smaller loads into one cargo once they had passed the English settlements.[73] Referring to a slave-trading case involving the former French agent for the region Monsieur Lewis De Mars, in 1793, EIC official Matthew Yeats remarked,

> the long famine which has prevailed in this country had hitherto enabled the French to procure any number of slaves without proceeding to acts of violence; but rice being now in some degree of plenty, they could not be had on the easy terms, or in such numbers as they formerly were; less cautious measures than had hitherto been pursued became necessary to procure them,

> and were openly practised. Not only were such beggars as were to be found in Yanam picked up, but country people, who had come there to purchase rice, were either forcibly carried away, or decoyed by their emissaries to places of confinement.[74]

Witnesses from Ganjam reported that French procurers had sent agents to neighbouring villages to offer employment to impoverished tailors and coolies, who they then kept confined before forcibly boarding them, by night, onto the boats. Bundada Vencataroyaloo, a Banian inhabitant of Yanam, noted that 'some of those who were refractory were gagged, and a stupefying liquor given to others, who were sent off in that condition'. Similarly, a dancing woman called Mootala claimed she was asked to perform for a gentleman, who gave her arrack to drink until she was intoxicated and then had her put on the boat.[75]

The piecemeal nature of the Indian Ocean slave trade meant it lacked the industrial-scale horror of the Atlantic middle passage, yet conditions on individual voyages could be traumatic. Before embarkation, slaves had to be kept securely and discretely on land, sometimes for significant periods, until a suitable vessel was found. As late as 1812, it was report that slaves freed from a house in Janganacherry (Changanacherry) were 'a most wretched set, and almost naked'.[76] One complained that he had been kept in irons, in a small hole, and 'almost killed of hunger'.[77] Once embarked, some boats could be very tightly packed; when Matthew Yeats released six women and a child from a godown in Yanam, in 1793, they claimed to have only escaped exportation because the ships were too full to take any more on board. Given that the two vessels sailed with a combined cargo of 800 slaves, their inability to accommodate seven more suggests they were already severely overloaded. Mr Robert Scobie, who unsuccessfully attempted to secure the slaves' release, claimed there were many slaves on both vessels and that he 'distinctly heard the cries of those confined below'.[78] Such large-scale slave voyages were relatively uncommon, however, as slaves in the Indian Ocean trade usually formed just one component of a varied cargo that might include textiles, rice, grain, other food stuffs or cattle. The 'foreign merchants' arraigned in Madras in 1790, for example, noted that they also had paddy, rice, grain, cloth and 'different sorts of goods' on board, which they were selling at the local ports.[79] In this instance, the merchants were disposing of the slave-children individually, from port to port, as the opportunity arose. Others, however, were bound for longer journeys and collective sale in slave colonies in the Mascarenes and elsewhere.

Although the mixed cargoes on many of these vessels meant that slaves were less tightly packed than on the dedicated Atlantic slavers, conditions on board could still be lamentable. In a chilling insight into the multiple

violations involved in the Indian Ocean trade, a British official reported that several women captured by one Captain Guillard in 1792 had been forced to 'submit to his desires and eat his food' on board ship, suggesting both their sexual violation and the forced contravention of caste rules of commensality.[80] Clare Anderson has noted how the conditions on board even comparatively well-provisioned convict ships in the early nineteenth century resulted in the violation of caste conventions, as individuals of various backgrounds and statuses were forced into close and often unsanitary living conditions. Such indignities, she argues, formed part of the punishment for high-caste prisoners and the term 'kala pani' or 'black water' was coined to refer to the loss of caste suffered on board ship.[81]

Slaves may not have been as tightly packed on vessels in the Indian Ocean 'middle passage', but they were still subject to numerous dangers, and mortality rates were high. The voyage from India to Mauritius averaged about forty-four days in the late eighteenth century, compared to between thirty and sixty days from Africa to the West Indies.[82] Unpredictable weather patterns could extend even relatively short voyages, however, while piratical attacks were not unheard of. In 1793, a French ship carrying 180 Indian slaves bound for Mauritius was seized by Malay pirates at Pedir, who killed all those who did not escape by jumping overboard.[83] Disease, suicide and shipwreck could all reduce slave life-expectancy; in 1791, thirty Bengali slaves were rumoured to have been drowned off a French boat near Channel Creek.[84] Richard B. Allen provides a detailed account of the hardships suffered by slaves bound for the Mascerenes, and estimates average mortality rates of 20 per cent to 25 per cent from India and 25 per cent to 30 per cent from West Africa, compared to the average of 14.9 per cent on French ships in the Atlantic trade.[85] Such high figures may reflect the fact that slaves were particularly vulnerable when already weakened by famine conditions on land. It was alleged that thirty or forty of the 170 slaves exported by Peter Horrebow from Bengal died of smallpox while on board ship—a particularly virulent and difficult-to-contain killer that was not uncommon on slave voyages.[86] Horrebow originally intended to take the slaves to Mauritius, but stopped at Colombo because of this infection. Witnesses there claimed the slaves were 'in wretchedness and poverty' and complained of their 'noise and filth'.[87] Of the slaves embarked by Andrew Perry in 1790, seven had died by the time they reached Masaulipatam, prompting EIC officials to conclude that they had been ill-provisioned and badly treated on board. When interrogating Perry's crew about the conditions on ship, EIC officials couched their questions in terms that implied a comparison with the Atlantic trade: How much food was allowed per slave? Were they kept confined below decks?

EIC authorities presented the release of trafficked slaves as a humanitarian act by a benevolent and progressive government, but were left with

the problem of what to do with those it had freed, many of whom were in an enfeebled condition. Where possible, it preferred to return them to their families; in 1790, for example, it paid Captain John Fergusson of the *Experiment* one pagoda per head, plus provisions, to take thirty-two slaves, released from Andrew Perry, back to their original district, although those who were 'able to work for their livelihood' were given the option of remaining in Madras.[88] The harsh agricultural conditions that had originally contributed to their enslavement meant that return did not always guarantee the former slaves' future maintenance, however, and EIC officials were often called on to provide for those who did not have immediate recourse to employment or local networks of support. The cost of maintaining large numbers of freed slaves was considerable and several magistrates contacted their superiors for guidance about the level of support that should be given to freed slaves, and who would pay for it.[89] As a result, EIC officials attempted to find solutions that allowed able-bodied slaves to contribute to their own maintenance by working, even if this sometimes verged on a form of coerced labour. In Madras, in 1793, for example, cotton entrepreneur Stephen Popham offered to take freed children as apprentices for terms of three, five or seven years. This request was declined, as the authorities intended to return the children to their families, but he was allowed to employ them (and thus shoulder the bill for their subsistence) until the necessary arrangements could be made. When 565 slaves were rescued near Bimlipatam (Bheemunipatnam), in April 1793, EIC authorities at Vizagapatam (Visakhapatnam) were unsure what to do with them, noting 'as we had taken them from those who fed them, we were obliged for the present to make provision for their support'. Maintaining so many people was costing upwards of 1,000 rupees a month, however, so they decided to divide the ex-slaves 'in equitable proportions' among local 'renter' agriculturalists, with instructions that they should be properly provided for and employed in agricultural production. To ensure their good treatment, the local officials would provide reports on how they were being employed and notify the authorities of any casualties that occurred. The 'renters' were by no means enamoured of this suggestion, however. They had been badly hit by the recent famine, to the extent that they had been forced to defer part of their revenue payment; the ex-slaves, they argued, would simply be an added expense at a time when they could least afford it. Although the local agent admitted that more than 200 of the former slaves were too enfeebled to work,[90] the Vizagapatam authorities were unimpressed with this response: 'in sending these people', they declared,

> we had the benefit of the country in view, and of course the advantage of the renters, to whom, in the depopulated state of the district, an accession of hands could not but be highly acceptable; but since we find that they are

> solely intent on their own immediate interests, it becomes us to be equally attentive to our rights over them, and accordingly desire that you will instantly and peremptorily demand payment of what is due from them on account of the current kists.[91]

The renters were clearly to be punished for their failure to co-operate, although the EIC authorities also decided to make alternative arrangements for the slaves. Those who were able to work were to be employed in cutting firewood, repairing tanks and roads, and performing 'such public work as may be useful'. The produce of their labour was to be 'applied towards the discharge of the expense which their maintenance must occasion'. Those who were too weak were to be excused from labour, but were to be 'compelled to work as soon as they may be enabled to do so'.[92] That poor indigent children were to be obliged to work, even after their release from slavery, seems paradoxical, but must be understood in the context of eighteenth-century British poor laws. Under English law all men and women were eligible for relief, and parishes, as the local units of church and state, were responsible for organising it. Finance for poor relief was raised through taxes on property, assessed on the basis of local rental rates, while leading local property owners could be made unpaid overseers of the local poor. Moreover, after 1697, in England, employers could be fined if they refused to take on pauper apprentices assigned to them by the state. Workhouses were brought into being from the end of the seventeenth century, their function being both as a deterrent to indolence and as a means of rehabilitating the poor through the discipline of work. The poor law thus provided relief, but also enforced discipline and was an expression of communal responsibility, but also of social distance.[93] By trying to make the local renters responsible for the upkeep of the freed children, and by making those who were able work for their support, the EIC was drawing on traditions of local community responsibility for the poor, discipline of work and industriousness. The freed children, of course, had little choice in this solution and their salvation from slavery resulted in them being employed in what was effectively forced labour by the colonial state.

'A trade so shocking to humanity and so pernicious to your interests': the EIC, abolitionism and political pragmatism

The EIC's legislation against exporting slaves from their territories was passed nearly two decades before the metropolitan British prohibition of the slave trade in 1807, a fact that is sometimes used to suggest that the EIC was in the vanguard of the anti-slavery movement.[94] Richard B. Allen sees EIC actions in India as important formative precursors of abolitionist feeling,

prompted, in particular, by sentimental anxiety regarding the welfare of children, who were important recipients of humanitarian concern. Numerically, children appear to have formed the main bulk of many of the cargoes that were intercepted, and official EIC discourse on slave-trading in the late eighteenth century was overwhelmingly concerned with the stealing and trafficking of women, and especially children. This may, as Allen suggests, indicate the importance of ideas about childhood in the formation of both East Indian and Atlantic abolitionism.[95] It may, however, also simply reflect the fact that women and children predominated in the indigenous Indian trade, the demographics of which differed substantially from its Atlantic counterpart.

The language in which European slave-trading in India was discussed in official EIC correspondence was that of the emerging British abolitionist movement. European slaving along India's coasts was described as 'nefarious', 'infamous', 'disgraceful', 'barbarous', 'scandalous' and 'shocking to humanity', suggesting that the attitudes of EIC officials were conditioned by knowledge of, and sympathy for, metropolitan anti-slavery ideals. The colonial press in India carried reports of abolitionist activities in Britain and appeared both optimistic about their chances and broadly supportive of their aims.[96] 'The abolition of the slave trade met with opposition from those whose interests will be hurt thereby', the *Calcutta Chronicle* remarked in 1789, 'but it was too feeble to avail; the sense of the nation is in favour of it.'[97] Yet the colonial press was not entirely unsympathetic to the claims of their compatriots in the other Indies, and shared, if not support for slavery, then at least concern about the balance of authority between metropolitan centre and colonial periphery. 'In giving freedom to a class of human beings, ignorant of its blessings', the *Calcutta Gazette* hoped that, 'the wisdom of the British legislator will doubtless attend to the interests of its subjects, although at a distance from the seat of government.'[98]

The suggestion that the EIC was an early exponent of abolitionism conflicts with the perspectives taken by revisionist scholars such as Indrani Chatterjee, who argues that the EIC showed markedly little concern with abolishing Indian slavery, resisting attempts to instigate measures against it and failing to take decisive steps even after it was delegalised in 1843.[99] Such contradictions can be explained in part by tensions within EIC policy itself, which differentiated between slave-trading as a strategic and law and order issue and slave-holding as a socially embedded and relatively benign system. As a result, humanitarian sentiment was constantly juxtaposed against complex considerations about local conditions, the extent and nature of EIC governmental authority, the right to own legally acquired human property and the imperatives of colonial stability. These tensions were to become even more apparent in the debates about slavery and slave-trading between British

India and the princely states in the mid nineteenth century. They were, however, apparent even in the earliest legislation of 1774, in which both EIC anti-slavery sentiment and the limits of potential EIC intervention are made clear: 'there appears to be no way of remedying this calamitous evil', Warren Hastings noted, 'but that of striking at the root of it, and abolishing the right of slavery altogether, *excepting in such cases as the authority of government cannot reach*'.[100] These exclusions clearly related to the master's enforceable rights of property over legally purchased slaves. Although 'the most creditable' Hindu and Muslim inhabitants of Bengal were said to condemn slave-trading as 'repugnant to the particular precepts of both the Koran and the Shaster, oppressive to the people and injurious to the general welfare of the country', slavery was deemed an 'authorised usage' in both Hindu and Muslim laws.[101] The possibility of intervening to free existing slaves, whether held by Indians or Europeans, or to prevent their lawful sale or exchange, was explicitly rejected.[102] Thus, although Cornwallis mentioned, at the time of the 1789 proclamation, that he had a plan in mind for bringing about the end of slavery altogether, 'without doing much injury to the private interests, or offering great violence to the feelings of the natives', the only legislation to be passed or enforced related to slave-trafficking, rather than slave-holding.[103]

The tension between private interests, private property and humanitarian ideology apparent in late eighteenth-century legislation against slave-trading in India resonates with that at the centre of British slavery debates in the 1820s, as West Indian planters defended their right to legally purchased human property and raised the spectre of unrest, instability and chaos should their slaves be freed. Such concerns had added significance in late eighteenth-century India, however, as Cornwallis attempted to rehabilitate the EIC's reputation as a benevolent, paternalist ruler. The accusations of corrupt and illiberal EIC government, made so publicly by Edmund Burke during the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, had been couched in the language of tyranny, enslavement and the capricious whim of a Governor-General who disregarded individual rights, privileges and property.[104] In this context, Cornwallis's emphasis on both the benevolence of the suppression of slave-trading and the government's regard for private interests and private property can be understood as part of a wider repositioning of the EIC as a legitimate, responsible ruler, whose principles, although configured to fit the colonial context, were in many ways consistent with the overall paradigm of political culture in England.[105]

If the framing of the debate on slave-trafficking in late eighteenth-century Bengal and Madras intersected with metropolitan concerns about anti-slavery, humanitarianism and the principles of liberty and property, they were also deeply contingent on conditions within India itself. Full

EIC government was not long established in many areas in the 1780s and 1790s, and new territories were constantly being added, creating ever-expanding frontier regions that needed to be settled, policed and administered. The borders between EIC possessions and those of Indian princes, or other European companies, were neither static nor distinct in this period and people could move, or be moved, across these porous boundaries with relative ease. Moreover, conflicts with Mysore in the south, as well as ongoing tensions between the EIC and its European rivals, exacerbated fears of instability and disorder. In these circumstances, the unregulated exportation of colonial subjects as slaves was deemed inimical to the peace, stability and profitability of the country. As Cornwallis himself put it in a letter to the Court of Directors, the exportation of slaves was both 'so shocking to humanity and so pernicious to your interests'.[106] William Meadows, Governor of Madras, likewise noted that is was both 'injurious to the rights of humanity' and 'detrimental to the country'.[107] The decision to intervene to prevent European slave-trafficking, though couched in the language of humanitarianism, cannot be divorced from pragmatic considerations about stability, law and order, population density, labour resources and the collection of the revenue. Thus, when J. Shakespeare and William Holland, EIC officials in Dacca, inquired whether the 1774 regulation prohibiting the enslavement of formerly free individuals applied to the children of existing slaves, they were asked to provide a report on every circumstance connected with slavery in those frontier regions of Bengal in which it was 'any way connected with, or is likely to have any influence on, the cultivation or revenue'.[108] On considering the resulting report, the Government of India decided that the master's right to the children of his slaves could not be legally taken from them in the first generation, but that it should not to extend beyond that.[109] Concern for the emancipation of children in this context, though present, was tempered by anxieties about the individual property rights, the effectiveness of cultivation and the stability of the revenue.

Concerns about the conditions of agricultural production and tax collection were exacerbated in the 1770s, 1780s and 1790s by catastrophic famines that decimated the population, severely damaged cultivation and threatened the supply of both labour and revenue. Although slavery may have provided temporary relief for some starving peasants, in the context of an already depleted population the illegitimate removal of EIC subjects by foreign powers was deemed a significant threat to the long-term prosperity of the region. The EIC agent at Ingeram, Matthew Yeats, for example, denounced slave-trafficking in the area as 'destructive to the interests of a country already deprived of one moiety of its inhabitants by famine';[110] as critics of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, an early Governor-General of the Dutch

East Indies, had put it in the seventeenth century, 'there is no profit at all in an empty sea, empty countries, and dead people'.[111] EIC emphasis on the trade in women and children perhaps reflects the anxiety that depopulation would be exacerbated by the loss of reproductive, as well as productive labour.

EIC officials repeatedly demonstrated that their primary concern was preventing the export trade, rather than interfering with the status of privately held slaves, reinforcing the idea that depopulation, rather than enslavement, was the problem. When Mr Borel, a Swiss officer in the service of the Dutch at Colombo, was found with six Bengali boys and girls in his house in 1789, he was suspected of trafficking them. The children, who were aged between six and twelve years, had all passed through several hands before being sold to Borel, including those of Muslims, Armenians, Portuguese, Indians and others of undisclosed identities, some of whom were clearly procurers rather than private slave-owners. Despite this, EIC officials were prepared to return the children to Borel, on the condition that he pledged that 'he had no intention of exporting them, or disposing of them to be slaves in other parts of India'.[112] Only two of the children were ultimately returned to him, however, and, as he claimed that these were his personal servants, he was eventually allowed to take them to sea, on condition that 'they shall neither be treated as slaves, nor sold as such'.[113] He did not, it seems, want the other children back if he could not export them, while the EIC officials involved were not committed to freeing purchased slaves, but merely with preventing their export. The Dutch authorities at Pulicat made a similar distinction between the export trade and the purchase of individuals as personal slaves. In response to EIC pressure to prevent trafficking through their territories, they noted that they would not 'permit the commanders to export, or lawfully purchase any more than one or two for their own service', or allow them to 'carry them out of the country, or alienate them when our ships arrive'.[114]

Worries about depopulation were exacerbated by concerns over the destabilising effect of slave raiding on local populations. Although most Europeans accused of slaving claimed to have acquired their cargoes 'legitimately' through distress sales, in some cases violence and coercion were clearly used, resulting in the unregulated movement of large numbers of people over territorial boundaries and between jurisdictions. That the EIC viewed slave-trading as a law and order problem was evident from the outset; the initial legislation of 1774 was raised in the context of maintaining order in Calcutta and helping to 'remedy all the disorders incident to so populous a city'.[115] Disputes between masters and servants were, apparently, clogging up the wheels of justice and policing, and this provided part of the rationale for formalising the transfer of existing slaves and preventing the enslavement of others. The Malabar Commission's decision to suppress

slave-trading also resulted from law and order issues, as several large bands of robbers and freebooters were plaguing recently acquired parts of the province by kidnapping children for sale to European vessels operating along the coast.[116] When rumours emerged that many 'family women' and children 'of the superior castes', including a nine-year-old Brahmin boy, had been kidnapped and taken on board a French ship anchored in the Coringa roads near Yanam, there were serious disturbances in the town. Matthew Yeats, who was passing through the French enclave at the time, noted that

> [a] ferment which had already begun among the inhabitants and country people in the place, now broke forth; they assembled in considerable numbers about the chief's house and clamorously demanded their children and friends of him. I passed through Yanam late that night; they surrounded my palanquin, the sides of which being nearly closed, I did not perceive their motive, but concluded from the noise I heard that it was a drunken riot in the bazaar, in which idea I was confirmed by hearing my boys encourage each other to pass on. On my arrival at the factory I was again surrounded by a considerable number of people, who entreated me in the most urgent manner to interfere, and be the means of restoring their children and friends to them.[117]

Later, the house of the ship's owner, De Mars, was demolished by an angry mob. Fortunately for him, he had departed on the ship along with the enslaved inhabitants of Yanam.[118] Both the method by which the slaves were acquired—several had apparently been violently carried away after their homes had been forced open—and the resulting popular disturbances caused considerable concern to EIC officials, the more so because unofficial rumours of these events had quickly spread and 'had even reached Calcutta'.[119] The EIC's decision to send troops to resolve the issue, and to station officers and a detachment of troops at Coringa and Bimlipatam (Bheemunipatnam) to prevent slave-trafficking, reflected the need to conciliate local elites, calm fears and restore order, as well as to suppress slaving itself.[120] That other law and order benefits might also be expected is suggested by Yeats, who believed that it would not only prevent the 'shameful and ruinous' slave trade, but also 'restrain the licentiousness of the sailors and lascars that frequent the port'.[121]

European rivalries and humanitarian identities

The EIC decision to send troops to Coringa was partly motivated by the dissembling and evasive responses given by the French representative at Yanam, Pierre Sonnerat, when he was called upon to investigate instances of slave-trading in his territories.[122] Yeats, with whom he clearly had an antagonistic relationship, believed that Sonnerat had 'private reasons' for not putting

down the trade, remarking that is was hardly possible 'that in a village not one mile in length, and yet less in breadth, many hundreds of human beings can be confined and shipped off to slavery without the knowledge of the chief residing in it'.[123] The government of Madras received a more co-operative response from Sonnerat's superior, R. Defresne, who was quick to express his displeasure at the conduct of French subjects involved in the trade. As the Governor Charles Oakeley noted, however, Defresne's authority was too weak effectively to prevent the trade, prompting him to apply to Cornwallis for advice about how to proceed should it 'become necessary to redress the grievance by the exertions of our own government'.[124] In the meantime, Yeats was instructed to search any French vessels suspected of having slaves on board and to apprehend anyone found bargaining for slaves in his territories. If refused the right to do so, he was to cut the suspect vessel off from 'all means of Communication and supply from the shore'.[125]

Although couched in the language of humanitarian reform, EIC interventions in its European rivals' slaving activities in the early 1790s were primarily motivated by pragmatic considerations of strategic advantage. The Malabar Commission particularly criticised the exportation of Indian slaves to the French settlements at Mahe and the Dutch factory at Cochin, while Company officials in London expressed concern about Mahe's convenience as a port for servicing the 'constant demand of the French' for slaves for the Mascarenes.[126] In 1792, Governor Oakley rebuked his Dutch counterpart at Pulicat for allowing 'foreign contractors', probably French traders, to operate in his territories, but a year later had to inform the Court of Directors that the French were 'still uncommonly active in prosecuting this odious traffic'.[127] French nationals were certainly not the only ones involved in the trade, and EIC emphasis on their activities in particular must be understood in the context of ongoing European rivalries in India, for, although the British had effectively secured their dominance with victory at the Battle of Wandiwash in 1760, fears of French intrigue, especially their supposed support for Tipu Sultan of Mysore, continued to cast a shadow over the security of EIC territories. Such tensions were only heightened by the outbreak of war in Europe, and events in India cannot be separated from these larger global conflicts.

As Allen points out, the Mascarene Islands were important strategically and had been used very effectively during the Austrian War of Succession, the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, as both a naval depot and a base for French privateers, who wrecked havoc on Anglo-Indian shipping. With their strategic benefits about to be utilised again, EIC authorities in India and London were keen to cut off their labour supply from India in the face of escalating hostilities in 1792–3. The Mascarenes' ability to function in the late eighteenth century depended on a supply of slave labour, which needed to be constantly replenished owing

to high mortality rates. Most of these slaves came from Madagascar, Mozambique and the Swahili coast, but South Asia supplied considerable numbers—Allen estimates that perhaps as many as 21,000 Indian slaves were exported there between 1670 and 1810, accounting for up to 10 per cent of the islands' slave workforce, with a disproportionately high number of these being skilled labourers.[128] The outbreak of war in 1793 and British occupation of French territories in India effectively ended slave-trading from India to the Mascarenes, although, as Marina Carter and Hubert Gerbeau have shown, increased demand for labour in the early nineteenth century resulted in the previously legitimate trade going underground, before it was ultimately replaced by that of indentured labour in the mid nineteenth century. The topography of the Mascarenes was conducive to, and the French inhabitants supportive of, smuggling and some Indian slaves were illicitly imported well into the nineteenth century.[129] In 1812, for example, Captain Beale, the Superintendent for Bazaars, uncovered twenty-one slaves, mainly women and children, at the house of a Monsieur Vally of Janganacherry, supposedly bound for Mauritius.[130] The local Resident, J. Munro, noted that the local inhabitants had continued to purchase children 'in defiance' of EIC proclamations prohibiting the trade, adding that the case in question provided sufficient illustrations of the 'pernicious consequences' of this practice.[131] Official notice of slave-trading in this instance also had a pragmatic political context for the EIC authorities, however. As Munro put it,

> Janganacherry is placed under the immediate superintendence of a Portuguese inhabitant; it is remote from the civil control of any European authority, and being situated close to a large military cantonment, is a receptacle for smugglers, thieves and retailers of arrack and toddy. Considerable losses are sustained by the circar from the contraband trade carried on from Janganacherry; and I again beg permission to suggest the propriety of this place being put, like Anjengo, under the immediate control of the Resident.[132]

It is in the wider political context of European rivalries in India and globally that the EIC's attempts to put down the slave trade in areas both within and outside their jurisdiction must be understood. Yet, interfering by force to prevent slave-trading in areas under French or Dutch control was a delicate matter. On appointing Thomas Reddall to lead the contingent of sepoys stationed at Coringa, the Madras government advised him to exercise 'a considerable degree of circumspection'.[133] Individuals suspected of slave-trafficking were to be reported immediately to the French authorities at Yanam, but should this fail to produce 'the desired effect' Reddall

was authorised to 'employ such means as the circumstances may require' to prevent EIC subjects being exported as slaves. Initially, any military action was to be confined to EIC territory, it being improper for EIC forces to encroach on French or Dutch jurisdictions, but the Governor-General later sanctioned 'less delicate conduct', remarking that any necessary action was justified to release British subjects taken as slaves.[134] The Madras authorities underlined their commitment to this by promising Reddall immediate access to additional troops, should he need them.[135]

The confrontation with the French at Coringa roads, together with other 'repeated and strong representations' made by EIC officials to the Dutch at Pulicat and French at Pondicherry in 1792–3, highlight the ongoing tensions that existed between British, French and Dutch companies in India, even though by the 1790s the British were established as the dominant European power. Replies to EIC correspondence about the slave trade from both the Dutch and French authorities were strained. Their recalcitrance reflected not only the need to maintain a supply of slaves for their colonial settlements, but also their concern over perceived affronts to their sovereign authority within their colonial enclaves in India. Dutch officials at Pulicat were obviously chagrined by the 'imperious' attitudes of some EIC officials, who sent troops to search slave vessels in 'their' river. While they admitted the need to resist the 'disorder of making free men slaves', and acknowledged the EIC's military superiority on the subcontinent, they pointedly noted that Hindu law allowed impoverished parents to sell their children, and themselves, and inquired by what authority English law was to be enforced upon subjects of the Dutch nation. Ultimately, they grudgingly agreed to invalidate any sales of slaves made by 'foreigners' in their territories. There was, however, more than a little sarcasm in their avowed intention to send those subsequently released from slavery to the nearest British resident, to require him to provide both a certificate of receipt and a guarantee that the persons so released should not reappear in Dutch territories, and to direct any resulting disputes, or actions for damages by the dispossessed owners of human property to the British authorities.[136]

The EIC justified authoritative intervention in French and Dutch jurisdictions on the grounds that many victims of the trade were British subjects and that as a civilised state they had a duty to protect them, even across territorial boundaries. 'The natives of the country have a right to look for protection to that government,' the Madras authorities declared, 'which alone has the power of securing them and their families against the barbarous rapacity of individuals.'[137] Such statements simultaneously invoked the traditional responsibility of rulers to defend their subjects' bodies, rights and property, and asserted the state's authority over them. Moreover, by displacing guilt for the trade onto the French and Dutch, while retaining the moral authority of

protection for themselves, they made slave-trading an indicator of their rivals' 'otherness'; of an inferior morality that compared unfavourably to Britain's humanitarian impulses. 'While the English are engaged in abolishing the slave trade,' the *Calcutta Chronicle* noted indignantly, 'the French offer an additional bounty … for every slave imported to any of their West India settlements'.[138] Cornwallis believed that the French slave trade from Yanam had been carried on 'to an extent and in a manner that we could not have imagined Europeans of whatever nation would have been guilty of', while both he and EIC officials in Masaulipatam took great satisfaction in noting that no British subject had been 'so regardless of their characters' as to have been involved in 'this shameful species of commerce'.[139] Likewise, the *Calcutta Chronicle* noted,

> It is worthy of remark, from its singularity—that at a time, when the wisdom of the British legislature holds up to surrounding nations a great and glorious example of humanity, in the abolition of the slave trade—the detestable and abominable traffic should, for the first time, be practised among (not by) Britons in the East. The Dutch governor of the settlement where at the slaves were lately sold, was heard to make the following declaration, at his own table—'We want slaves, and therefore we will buy them;—but, to the honour of the British name be it said, that this is the first time I ever saw slaves here under the British flag.'[140]

Yet the moral contradictions inherent in the EIC's appropriation of the mantle of abolitionist reformer decades before the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807 did not go unnoticed, and their apparent innocence when it came to slave-trafficking was questioned. Dutch official C. L. Eilbraert, for example, claimed that the nephews of one of his servants had been kidnapped while in British territory. 'I find myself obliged to acquaint you', he wrote, 'that the transportation of men is practised everywhere … [and that] … barbarous actions of such a kind as [you] complain of, happen also at places under [your] own resort.'[141] In a final comment that cut straight to the heart of the incongruity of EIC anti-slavery assertions in the 1780s and 1790s, he noted that their emphatic assertion that to countenance such a trade 'much debased the character of a nation' '[did] not flatter much the governments in Europe themselves, amongst which those of your own nation grant exclusive privileges to provide certain parts of the West Indies with slaves; or is human nature there less to be pitied and commiserated than here in the East?'[142]

Conclusion

As the Dutch authorities so pointedly noted, EIC opposition to the slave trade in their territories in India in the 1780s and 1790s was at odds with metropolitan British tolerance of the African trade during this period. Richard B. Allen sees this as an indicator of early abolitionist sentiment in the ranks of the EIC, and it certainly appears that the majority of EIC officials whose attitudes are recorded in the colonial archive were in sympathy with the sentiments of the emerging anti-slavery movement at home. Yet it is important to remember that while the African trade tended to service British colonial interests in the West Indies, the trade on the Indian coasts by other European nations was perceived as an infringement of the sovereignty, the security and the prosperity of the EIC's Indian territories. That the EIC was so actively involved in suppressing a primarily European slave trade that directly violated their interests, while allowing other 'indigenous' forms of slavery and slave-trafficking to continue, is indicative of the pragmatic considerations of self-interest that determined which slave trades would be opposed and which would be tolerated. As Lata Mani has noted for the later colonial debate on the suppression of *sati*, what was at stake in EIC debates about European slave-trading in the late eighteenth century was not the reprehensibility of the practice so much as the limits of EIC authority and the feasibility of intervention.[143] By taking steps to prohibit and then prevent illicit slave raiding, the EIC was asserting its control over the bodies and movement of its subjects and reinforcing the spatial and ideological parameters of its authority in the face of encroachment by other European nations and private traders. As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, early EIC attempts to prevent depopulation through slave-trading resonate strongly with later attempts, from the 1810s on, to regulate and control the traffic in women and children that was carried on by itinerant groups over the porous boundaries between newly acquired EIC territory inland and the princely states. Both reflect the pragmatic expediencies of a colonial state concerned with settling, taxing and stabilising frontier regions, exerting control over the bodies of its subjects and controlling all forms of unregulated migration and movement. The enslavement and exportation of formerly free subjects was opposed as 'shocking to humanity' and 'injurious to the welfare of the country', not only because the state was thus deprived of their labour and their revenue but also because the process itself threatened state control over its subjects and its borders.[144]

Notes

1 Richard B. Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave-trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830', *William and Mary Quarterly* 66.4 (2009): 877.

2 See, for example, Howard Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 169–87.

3 P. J. Marshall, 'The Moral Swing to the East: British Humanitarianism in India and the West Indies', in K. Ballhatchet and J. Harrison (eds), *East India Company Studies: Papers Presented to Professor Sir Cyril Philips* (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1986), p. 79.

4 For a detailed discussion of various elisions of Indian slavery in the historiography, see Indrani Chatterjee, 'Renewed and Connected Histories: Slavery and the Historiography of South Asia', in Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Maxwell Eaton (eds), *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

5 Recent studies have begun to explore slavery and slave trades in the Indian Ocean, and to place them in their wider global contexts, although more work needs to be done to uncover both the role of the Indian subcontinent and the nature of European involvement in these complex networks. See, for example, Deryck Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998); Gwyn Campbell, *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and Portland, Oreg.: Frank Cass, 2004); W. G. Clarence-Smith (ed.), *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1989). Richard B. Allen has begun to redress the absence of European trades from India in this work with his detailed studies of the Mascarene slave trades, including the role of India as a source of supply. See Richard B. Allen, 'The Constant Demand of the French: The Mascarene Slave Trade and the Worlds of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Journal of African History* 49.1 (2008): 43–72. Similarly, Marcus Vink has explored Dutch Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, i.e., 'United East India Company') involvement in slaving in South and South East Asia. See Markus Vink, '"The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of World History* 14.2 (2003): 131–77. See also Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Marina Carter, 'Slavery and Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean', *History Compass* 4.5 (2006): 800–13 for an overview of patterns of slave-trading in this region.

6 Vink gives the following figures for annual slave exports from Bengal/Arakan: 1626: 380; 1636: 216; 1644: 600; 1647: 1,046; 1654: 311; 1655: 1,803; 1656: 288; 1658: 153; 1659: 407; 1660: 421; 1662: 101. Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', p. 141.

7 Ibid., p. 134.

8 Ibid., p. 141.

9 Vink gives the following figures for slave exports from Cormandel in the boom years: 1622–3: 1,900; 1645–6: 2,118; 1659–61: 8,000–10,000; 1673–7: 1,839; 1694–6: 3,859. The Dutch were not the only ones to exploit the unstable conditions brought about by the Nayaka revolt against Vijayanagara in 1645–6: indigenous accounts suggest that the armies of Bijapur and Golconda carried off more than 150,000 people. Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', pp. 140–3.

10 Ibid., p. 159.

11 Ibid.

12 Richard Eaton, 'Introduction', in Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Maxwell Eaton (eds), *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 11.
13 *Calcutta Review* 35 (1860): 217.
14 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), p. 3.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Cited in Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 10.
19 PP 1828, pp. 11–12
20 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', p. 884.
21 PP 1828, p. 12.
22 Ibid., p. 10.
23 Ibid., p. 14.
24 Ibid., p. 13.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 55.
27 Ibid., p. 468.
28 Ibid., p. 14.
29 Ibid., p. 19.
30 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 11, issue 283 (6 Aug. 1789).
31 PP 1828, p. 20
32 Ibid., p. 11.
33 Ibid., p. 12.
34 W. S. Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India* (Calcutta: O. T. Cutter, 1864), p. 208.
35 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', p. 882.
36 PP 1828, p. 477.
37 See Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*.
38 David Arnold, 'Hunger in the Garden of Plenty: The Bengal Famine of 1770', in Alessa Johns (ed.), *Dreadful Visitations: Confronting Natural Catastrophe in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 81–2.
39 Cited ibid., p. 83.
40 Ibid., p. 84.
41 PP 1828, p. 10.
42 Ibid., p. 480.
43 Cited in Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, p. 10.
44 Cited in Arnold, 'Hunger', p. 101.
45 Cited ibid., p. 92.
46 Ibid., p. 95.
47 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', p. 887.
48 PP 1828, p. 481.
49 Ibid., p. 471.
50 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', p. 885.
51 James Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs* (London: 1813), p. 172.

52 Charles Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals, and on the Means of Improving It* (London: House of Commons, 1813), p. 29.
53 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', p. 885.
54 Ibid., p. 886.
55 See also Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 114–16.
56 'Were a famine as frequent in Italy as it is in this country', he added, 'the idle Lazaroni of Naples would be benefited by a slavery which might secure them against hunger and want; the necessary result of their improvident idleness.' William Tennant, *Indian Recreations: Consisting Chiefly of Strictures on the Domestic and Rural Economy of the Mahommedans & Hindoos*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: C. Stewart, 1803), p. 134.
57 Ibid., p. 131.
58 PP 1828, p. 469.
59 Ravi Ahuja, 'Labour Relations in an Early Colonial Context: Madras, *c.*1750–1800', *Modern Asian Studies* 36.4 (2002): 811.
60 Ibid.
61 PP 1828, p. 484.
62 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 812.
63 PP 1828, p. 484.
64 Ibid., p. 473.
65 Ibid., p. 475.
66 Ibid., p. 473.
67 Ibid., p. 476.
68 Ibid., p. 51.
69 Ibid., p. 29.
70 Ibid., p. 33.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., p. 25.
73 Ibid., p. 491.
74 Ibid., p. 498.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., p. 792.
77 Ibid., p. 793.
78 Ibid., p. 497.
79 Ibid., p. 469.
80 Ibid., p. 493.
81 Clare Anderson, 'Convicts and Coolies: Rethinking Indentured Labour in the Nineteenth Century', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 30.1 (2009): 101–3. High-caste sepoys and other travellers avoided commensality on board ship quite easily by subsisting on a diet of gram and other pulses, or by establishing separate cooking facilities.
82 The actual length of voyage from Africa to the Americas, like that from India to Mauritius, could vary greatly, depending on both the departure point and weather conditions.
83 PP 1828, pp. 526–37.
84 Ibid., p. 30.
85 Allen, 'Constant Demand', p. 57.

86 Ibid.
87 PP 1828, p. 20.
88 Ibid., p. 470.
89 In 1792, for example, the superintendent of police claimed for 206 rupees for expense incurred in feeding and housing the slaves released from the *Stistam Low*. Ibid., p. 41.
90 Ibid., p. 523.
91 Ibid., p. 524.
92 Ibid.
93 For more on this, see Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531–1782* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).
94 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', pp. 876–7.
95 Ibid., p. 881. For more on the role of children in various slave trades, see Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph Calder Miller, *Children in Slavery through the Ages* (Athens, Ohio and London: Ohio University Press, 2009).
96 In Oct. 1789, for example, the *Calcutta Chronicle* reported that 'it was generally supposed the act which has been so long in agitation, for the abolition of the slave trade, would pass both Houses of Parliament.' *Calcutta Chronicle; and General Advertiser*, vol. 4, issue 195 (15 Oct. 1789).
97 Ibid., vol. 4, issue 196 (22 Oct. 1789).
98 Ibid., vol. 4, issue 192 (24 Sept. 1789).
99 See Indrani Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in the Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).
100 PP 1828, p. 3, emphasis mine.
101 Ibid. On the use of Hindu and Muslim laws in colonial India, see Michael Anderson, 'Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in British India', in David Arnold and Peter Robb (eds), *Institutions and Ideologies: A SOAS South Asia Reader* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993); Bernard S. Cohn, 'Law and the Colonial State in India', in June Starr and Jane Fishburne Collier (eds), *History and Power in the Study of Law: New Directions in Legal Anthropology* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989); Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
102 PP 1828, p. 3.
103 Cornwallis's plan is discussed in greater detail below.
104 For more on Hasting's impeachment, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006); P. J. Marshall, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
105 See Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*.
106 PP 1828, p. 13.
107 Ibid., p. 469.
108 Ibid., p. 3.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid., p. 497.
111 Julia Adams, 'Principals and Agents, Colonialists and Company Men: The Decay of Colonial Control in the Dutch East Indies', *American Sociological Review* 61.1 (1996): 12.
112 PP 1828, p. 22.

113 Ibid., p. 23.
114 Ibid., p. 488.
115 Ibid., p. 3.
116 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', p. 887.
117 PP 1828, p. 496.
118 Ibid., p. 516.
119 Ibid., p. 504.
120 The stationing of troops at Bimlipatam was in response to the recovery of 565 'young persons' intended to be exported as slaves.
121 PP 1828, p. 497.
122 Pierre Sonnerat is perhaps better known for his activities as a naturalist and explorer and for his publications *Voyage à la Nouvelle-Guinée* (1776) and *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine, fait depuis 1774 jusqu'à 1781* (1782).
123 PP 1828, pp. 485, 497.
124 Ibid., p. 503.
125 Ibid., p. 495.
126 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', p. 880.
127 PP 1828, p. 477.
128 Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic', pp. 888–9.
129 Marina Carter and Hubert Gerbeau, 'Covert Slaves and Coveted Coolies in the Early 19th Century Mascareignes', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 9.3 (1988): 194–208. For more on slavery and indenture in Mauritius, see Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).
130 PP 1828, p. 803.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., p. 792. In 1819, following the kidnapping of a Nair boy and his sale to a Portuguese at Mahe, the EIC government had once again to write to the French authorities asking them to co-operate in suppressing the practice. Ibid., p. 905.
133 Ibid., p. 505.
134 Ibid., p. 507.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., p. 479.
137 Ibid., p. 504.
138 *Calcutta Chronicle; and General Advertiser*, vol. 4, issue 192 (24 Sept. 1789).
139 PP 1828, pp. 504, 506.
140 *Calcutta Chronicle; and General Advertiser*, vol. 4, issue 177 (11 June 1789).
141 PP 1828, p. 479.
142 Ibid., p. 480.
143 Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
144 PP 1828, p. 3.

3

Bengalis, Caffrees and Malays: European Slave-holding and Early Colonial Society

When tried for slave-trafficking in 1789, Danish captain Peter Horrebow expressed his surprise that such activity should be illegal, given that owning slaves was permitted in British India and public sales and auctions regularly took place in Calcutta. The EIC's 1774 prohibition of slave-trafficking allowed the sale or transfer of existing slaves, providing this was formalised by a written deed. The proclamation of 1789 similarly focused on preventing the export trade rather than interfering with domestic slavery in European or Indian homes. Moreover, when discussions about domestic and agricultural slavery in India began in the early nineteenth century, these were overwhelmingly conducted in the context of indigenous social and labour practices, rather than of the domestic economies of colonial European households. Yet many Europeans, including Britons, held Indian, African and Malay slaves as domestic servants in their homes in late eighteenth-century India. '[H]ardly a man or woman exists in a corner of this populous town', Sir William Jones wrote of Calcutta in 1785, 'who hath not at least one child slave.'[1] This 'conspicuous presence of domestic slaves in Anglo-Indian households', historian Margot Finn reminds us, 'emerges clearly from an array of late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century manuscript sources. Physically visible, economically vital and philosophically perplexing, domestic slaves animate the archive of inventories, wills and private letters that documents social life in India under Company rule.'[2] They also appear, sometimes obliquely, in newspaper advertisements, judicial pronouncements and the official correspondence of EIC representatives. These sources expose not only the existence of slavery in colonial homes, but also the ambiguous limits of the European slave-holder's authority in India and the liminal statuses that could be occupied between chattel slave, waged servant and family member.

Although domestic chattel slavery was clearly an element of early colonial

society in India, the extent of the owner's penal power and the demarcation between individual and state authority over colonial subjects who were also slaves was not as clearly defined as in other slave-holding colonies. In the Caribbean, for example, although ameliorative legislation was brought in after 1790, designed to improve conditions, in practice, 'Masters had complete control over their slaves and, as property owners, were given wide discretion in enforcing subordination and control.'[3] Slaves could give evidence in court against each other, but not for or against free persons, which obviously made it difficult for them to protest against maltreatment. As a result, as Barbara Bush-Slimani notes, 'Penalties placed on slave-owners for contravention of the laws were unrealistic and it was still virtually impossible to convict a master for crimes against his slaves.'[4] In India, some Europeans were prosecuted by the colonial state for such crimes, however, and slaves were permitted to give testimony against their abusers, although the functioning of justice was still highly uneven and resulted in few serious punishments for the Europeans involved. Such cases provide an insight into the socio-legal ideologies that informed attitudes to domestic slaves in India, which owed less to Caribbean slave law than to metropolitan assumptions about a master's rights over and duties towards his servants. The coercive aspects of British domestic labour laws were intensified in the colonial context, however, functioning within racial as well as class-specific contexts that upheld the master's proprietary rights over the labour and body of his slave, even while they were tempered by anti-slavery sentiment among some colonial officials. The ambiguous status of domestic slaves, and their owner's attitudes towards them, thus reflected the unique conditions of a colonial culture that was neither a fully functioning 'slave society' nor an entirely 'slaveless' one. This chapter explores these contradictions, focusing particularly on the dynamics of the master–slave relationship for what they reveal about the development of British colonial identity in the East Indies.

'The retinue of an Eastern King': servants, slaves and the colonial home

In contrast to many other colonies, Britons in India did not develop a fully fledged settler society, nor were they tied to India for 'their prestige, their social or psychological well being, their livelihood, or their views of themselves'.[5] Whether EIC officials, military men or private entrepreneurs, most Britons saw India as a temporary posting and intended, if lucky enough to survive the notorious Indian climate, eventually to retire home to enjoy the fruits of their labour. In the meantime, however, they developed a lifestyle in India that both facilitated their physical survival and reinforced

their position as the ruling race. As Elizabeth Collingham has shown, this meant both rethinking bodily practice in the context of a hostile tropical environment and maintaining high levels of ceremony and display, in keeping with the perceived practices of the Mughal and Hindu elites whose positions they had usurped.[6] EIC officials attached to Indian courts in Delhi and Lucknow, for example, kept extensive establishments that mirrored those of the rulers to whom they were assigned. Sir David Ochterlony (Fig. 2), the British Resident at Delhi, was famous for his Mughal-Indian lifestyle and *zenana* of wives and concubines. On meeting Ochterlony in 1824, Bishop Heber described an entourage that 'might pass in Europe for that of an Eastern King' and noted monthly expenses of almost 15,000 rupees.[7] Few came close to Ochterlony's extravagant display, of course, but large retinues, sometimes including slaves, were considered necessary for physical comfort and indispensable as a signifier of prestige and authority.

After they moved out of the factories, their original fortified trading stations on the coast, sufficiently wealthy Europeans built elaborate homes, with imposing imperial facades, in pleasant locations on the outskirts of existing towns. As a result, distinct 'white' areas developed, separate from the native 'black-towns'.[8] Bernard Cohn suggests that this 'physical isolation'

Figure 2. Sir David Ochterlony (1758–1825) in Indian dress, smoking a hookah and watching a *nautch* in his house at Delhi.

reflected a desire to escape the crowded, noisy and dirty Indian town, and purchase enough cheap land to build architecturally impressive bungalows that were suited to the Indian climate, because they received air on all four sides.[9] In doing so the British created their own colonial suburbs, but we must not overemphasise the resulting degree of racial segregation. As Swati Chattopadhyay notes, not only were there substantial 'mixed' areas in most towns, where less-affluent whites had their business premises along side well-to-do Indians, but the very functioning of the 'white-town' relied upon the presence of vast numbers of Indians.[10] Within their palatial bungalows, the British were surrounded by Indian servants, bearers and slaves.[11] Even the more humble European abodes in the *mofussil* (countryside) and the lower ranks of Anglo-Indian society—'the time-expired soldiers turned tavern-keepers … small shopkeepers … European servants who had set up on their own … sailors and craftsmen'[12]—kept household staffs well in excess of what those of similar social standing in Britain would be expected, or able, to afford.[13] Captain Thomas Williamson's unofficial handbook for EIC employees, *East India Vade Mecum* (1810) listed thirty-nine different types of servants deemed necessary for a well-ordered Anglo-Indian home.[14] These might range from relatively high-status employees like a *munshi* or *pandit* (clerk, interpreter or language teacher) and a *banian* (money agent) to more menial domestics employed to cook, clean, wash, garden, wait table, care for horses and equipage and pull *punkahs* (fans).[15] Thus, European conceptions of the caste system were reproduced in the specific division of labour and domestic hierarchy of the colonial home. Most servants within this hierarchy were wage labourers, but some were slaves who had accompanied their owners from other parts of the empire, or been purchased in India from other European householders, slave-dealers or their own families. James Forbes, for example, records that his family establishment included both servants (who were not given food, clothing or lodging but received a monthly stipend) and slaves (who ate in the house and were furnished with clothes and provisions).[16] He even compared the luxurious apparel of influential African slaves in elite Muslim households to that of his 'little Anjengo captives', the cost of whose maintenance amounted to only a few rupees a month.[17]

Notices in the Bombay, Madras and Calcutta press suggest that holding, buying and selling domestic slaves was both widespread and socially acceptable in late eighteenth-century colonial society. Advertisements seeking the sale or purchase of slaves, or the return of escapees, were placed by Europeans of various nationalities, including many who by their names and titles appear to have been respectable British residents. Some domestic establishments glimpsed through these records suggest the archetypal slave-holding scenario—racially white individuals, or families, holding purchased

slaves as property, and living in homes with slave accommodation attached, such as a bungalow offered for sale at Chinsurah that was 'surrounded by a spacious garden, and convenient out-buildings; as, slave rooms, godowns, warehouses, stables'.[18] Others, however, involved more-complex families and more-ambiguous relationships between masters and slaves.

Chattel slaves were sold openly, both at auction and through the 'small ads' of the colonial press, and their appearance alongside other items of commerce emphasises their commodification. The *India Gazette*, for example, in 1781, advertised 'For Private Sale; a Slave-girl, about 20 Years of age, and some Pegue Sheathing Boards'.[19] The following year the same newspaper advertised the public auction, 'for Sicca Rupees and ready money', of a quantity of china goods, various textiles, women's embroidered shoes, silk mittens, gown and cap trimmings, household furniture, Batavia arrack, porter, claret, sugar-candy and 'sundry other items', adding that 'Two Slave-boys and a Girl, and a quantity of damaged Rice, are also to be disposed of at the same time'.[20] A few months later it advised of the auction of 'some cut Diamonds; a quantity of China Sugar-Candy in Boxes, of the first quality; a quantity of the best Danish Claret, in chests of 12 dozen each, deliverable at Serampore; two slave-girls, about six years old; and a great variety of other articles'.[21] Margot Finn notes the appearance of these often anonymous domestic slaves within wills and probate lists indicated 'their place at only the cusp of humanity'. Thomas Jones's 'Slave-girl', for example, was listed in his probate inventory between a book and a horse.[22]

In addition to announcements of sale, the colonial press also carried 'hue and cry' appeals for the return of absconding slaves.[23] These often gave relatively detailed descriptions of runaways and together with sale notices provide a glimpse of slaves' diverse roles and identities. Slaves were employed in various capacities, including skilled or specialist labour. Some were trained as entertainers: two African slaves offered for sale, for example, were said to 'play very well on the French horn'. Others were highly literate, such as William Williams's 'slave-boy' who could 'read and write the Persian Language perfectly',[24] or the twelve-year-old slave, whose escape was announced in *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* in 1782, who could 'speak, read, and write English very well'.[25] Another hue and cry notice requested that no one employ the runaway 'as a writer, or in any other capacity', suggesting not only literacy, but also numeracy.[26] Others undertook specific domestic functions. A slave who absconded from a Mr Purkis in 1789 'had on ... the dress of a Kistmutgar [*under-butler*] and spoke good English',[27] while in 1785, the *Calcutta Gazette* advertised the auction of 'A very stout slave-boy, who knows the business of a Butler, and is capable of being a very useful hand on board ship'.[28] In 1781, a slave-girl 'who can sew, and is fit to take care of Children' was offered for sale by auction.[29] Such slaves were sufficiently valuable

to merit the expense of placing a newspaper advertisement and offering sometimes substantial rewards for their return. R. Hollier, for example, was willing to offer a gold mohur to anyone assisting in his fourteen-year-old slave-boy's recovery, while an unnamed resident of the Boitah Connah road offered two gold mohurs for the return of his thirteen-year-old slave-boy.[30] These slave-holders' legal right to own human property and demand its return is indicated by lines included in several of the hue and cry notices that state, 'Whoever harbours the said Slave-boy after this notice, will be prosecuted according to Law.'[31]

Bengalis, Caffreys and Malays

Although most of the slaves described in the advertisements for sale or recapture were not ascribed specific racial identities, presumably being locally acquired, some were obviously of South East Asian or African descent. Several advertisements spoke specifically of 'Malay' slaves, bought from Batavia and elsewhere, while others referred to 'Caffree', or 'Coffree' slaves of African origin. Thus, the *India Gazette* in 1781 announced the sale of 'two stout young Coffree Slave-boys',[32] while an advertiser in *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* sought to buy a 'faithful and honest Coffree slave'.[33] An article describing late eighteenth-century Calcutta life in the *Calcutta Review* of 1860 alluded to several similar advertisements regarding African slaves, including one offering for sale, for 400 rupees, 'A Coffree boy that understands the business of a butler, kidmutgar and cooking' and inviting interested parties to inspect the merchandise.[34] In 1793, in Bombay, a 'Coffree Slave' named Pedro was rewarded for his gallantry in apprehending a burglar at a nearby house,[35] while in 1806, one James Biron, a master in the pilot service, was caught trying to throw the body of a badly beaten 'Coffree woman' into the Hughli; he was later found not guilty of her murder.[36]

African slaves were both a source of labour and an article of commerce in eighteenth-century India. Ravi Ahuja details how African slaves acquired by Company contractors in Madagascar, or on the African mainland, were disembarked in Madras before being sent on to their final destination in South East Asia. Some remained in India, becoming slaves in Indian or European households, or joining the military; enough male Malagasy and African slaves enrolled into the Madras army in the 1750s to form a separate 'Coffrey Company'. This was still recruiting their sons a generation later, while gangs of imported female slaves were sometimes used in the fortification works of Fort St George.[37] Other African slaves may have arrived in India with their existing masters, or have been trafficked by Europeans.[38] The importation and use of African slaves by the Portuguese in

seventeenth-century Goa is well known,[39] while the involvement of Hindu Gujarati merchants in the slave trade from Mozambique, via the Portuguese Indian enclaves of Goa, Daman and Dui, has been the focus of more recent study. African slaves thus imported were often re-exported into the hinterland: Dui, in particular, was integrated into a north-west India trading complex, whence slaves were channelled into Kathiawar, Kutch and Sindh, often changing hands several times before reaching their final destinations in the homes of the Hindu or Muslim nobility. The number of African slave imports was not high, and fluctuated considerably, ranging from a small handful to 200 or 300 annually between 1770 and 1834.[40] James Forbes, in his *Oriental Memoirs*, specifically remarked on the presence of 'Abyssinian and Caffree slaves' at Cambay and Surat, noting that both Indian *nawabs* and Europeans owned them. Forbes believed that African slaves in Anglo-Indian establishments had little reason to complain of their lot, as 'they experience very different treatment from that of their African brethren in the West Indies. No cruel taskmasters and overseers increase the hardship of their bondage; they are all household servants, often confidential domestic friends, and never employed in agricultural or laborious work.' He was less optimistic about their treatment by Europeans of other nations; the condition of those enslaved to the Dutch was 'not so pleasant', while the native Portuguese were the worst masters of all, being 'generally a worthless race', who treated 'their helpless captives with excessive cruelty'.[41]

'Moderate chastisement', or 'wanton and unjust punishments'

By comparing benign British slave-holding in India to the brutal practices of the EIC's commercial rivals in the West Indies, its Europeans rivals in India or its supposed race/class inferiors, Forbes was both mitigating Anglo-Indian 'guilt' over owning African chattel slaves and reinforcing an emerging colonial identity that defined Britons in India in relation to 'other' colonies, nations and races. Such discursive strategies were not uncommon—Sir William Jones made similar comparisons between Anglo-Indian and 'other' slave-holders—and they indicate the ambivalent place that slavery and abolitionist sentiment occupied within early colonial society in India. The use of anti-slavery language in official EIC debates on slave-trafficking, for example, contrasts sharply with the socially sanctioned use of slave labour within the colonial home, suggesting tension between exported metropolitan ideas and the specific social and political context of colonial India. Thus, while slavery was widely denounced in principle, and slave-trafficking was actively prohibited, individual slave-holding was still deemed acceptable. Forbes, for example, believed any form of slavery was a 'bitter draught'

because 'the tender ties of parental, filial and fraternal affection are dissolved; all the domestic pleasures of youth destroyed, and many other painful deprivations accompany the galling chain: such must be the case of slavery, even in its best estate.'[42] Yet he did not scruple to describe the role of slaves in his own domestic arrangements in India. The author of a satirical letter to the *India Gazette* captured this ambiguity when he asserted that 'there is not an individual who reads this paper, but must own that he is, in fact, the servant of his servants; or if you chose a stronger expression, proper in this country, however improper it may be in itself, the slave of his slaves.'[43] Although Sir William Jones believed that 'absolute unconditional slavery, by which one human creature becomes the property of another, like a horse or ox, is happily unknown in the laws of England, and that no human law could give it just sanction', conditions in India were different, and EIC officials repeatedly confirmed European property rights in slaves.[44] Slavery in India occupied an anomalous position, conforming neither to the 'abolition' enacted in Britain by the Mansfield judgment nor to a full slave system of the kind established in the West Indies. As a result, the legal status of slaves in India was an amalgamation emerging out of specific colonial conditions; the master's right to property was upheld, but slaves were also considered subjects under the law and could, in theory, seek state intervention against abusive masters.

Although concrete legislation was never passed, the amelioration of slave conditions was discussed by the EIC in the 1780s. Sir William Jones, writing in 1785, told the jury in the case of John Osborne, a Portuguese accused of murdering his slave-girl, that 'whatever the court can do in terminating this evil [the mistreatment of slaves] will cheerfully be done', adding that he intended to recommend regulations to government that 'cannot fail of ensuring future protection to the injured, support to the weak, and some consolation at least to the wretched'.[45] Four years later, Governor-General Cornwallis expressed similar sentiments, informing the Court of Directors that he had 'a plan under consideration ... which has for its object the abolition of the practice under certain limitations, and the establishing of some rules and regulations to alleviate as much as may be possible, the misery of those unfortunate people during the time that they may be retained in that wretched situation.'[46] Richard B. Allen suggests that this implies a programme of gradual emancipation, although as it received no further mention in official EIC records, and Cornwallis' personal papers are silent about his abolitionist intentions and sentiments, it is difficult to be certain what was intended. Studies of Cornwallis' Indian career do not mention this plan and provide little insight into his possible motives, beyond a general assumption that he was 'driven by a deep and genuine desire to improve the condition of the Indian people'.[47] We may, however, gain some

insight into the kind of reform being discussed from an article published in the *Calcutta Chronicle* on 30 April 1789, which noted that

> Government we understand, have it in contemplation to adopt some wise and humane regulations respecting the selling and buying of slaves in this country, and the treatment that such of them as are now, or who may hereafter be in a state of bondage, are to experience from their masters or mistresses; which are nearly as follow: That the poor people whose necessities are such as to compel them to sell some of their children to support the remainder, be allowed to part with them. That no slave of either sex shall be shackled, on any account, with the marks of bondage, which many of them now are constrained to put on. That after the age of twenty one they are to have their freedom given to them, and that there be no slave above that age. That any slave who experiences ill treatment, or is cruelly used, on making a complaint, and proving it well founded, to be set at liberty. These, our correspondent acquaints us, are the general outlines; but that there are also other regulations, well calculated to afford relief and protection for this unfortunate class of people.[48]

If this plan corresponds to the one mentioned by Cornwallis, then it seems to have been directed at slaves held in European as well as Indian households. These provisions were never formally introduced, but ameliorative legislation was passed in other EIC territories; in 1790, the *Calcutta Chronicle* reported that

> [a] new Code of Laws has been lately established by the Court of Directors of the East India Company, and sent to the Island of St. Helena, intended to prevent the numerous acts of cruelty which are exercised by the natives of that Island, towards their slaves, whose situation is truly deplorable. Not a slave now can be punished, without just cause, and a hearing had before the Governor and Council, who are to inflict punishment as the nature of the case deserves.[49]

References to domestic slaves are found in Anglo-Indian wills as late as 1848,[50] but it is notable that the number of advertisements in the colonial press for the sale or purchase of slaves, or the return of runaways, decreases sharply after 1790, suggesting if not the 'emancipation' of slaves then a reconfiguration of the already ambiguous vocabulary of domestic servitude to erase this form of bondage from the discourse of colonial society.

If the EIC authorities' concern with ameliorating slave conditions suggests the existence of abolitionist sentiment within the EIC, it also suggests a desire to assert its authority over all its subjects, including slaves, by constraining (but not removing) the penal power of the master, and bringing the punishment of slave bodies under the control of the colonial state.

Perhaps the best known statement on the treatment of European-owned slaves in India was given by Sir William Jones. His more admiring biographers have often portrayed Jones as harbouring deep-rooted abolitionist sympathies. Vivian de Sola Pinto notes that he was 'an early opponent of negro slavery',[51] while Franklin Edgerton cites 'his burning words on slavery': 'I pass with haste by the coast of Africa', Jones wrote, 'whence my mind turns with indignation at the abominable traffic in the human species, from which a part of our countrymen dare to derive their most inauspicious wealth.'[52] Garland Cannon notes that Jones was among the first to attack child slave-trafficking in India, citing his critical commentary on the boatloads of children offered for open sale at Calcutta in 1789. Jones also criticised the mistreatment of domestic slaves in European homes, noting that 'the condition of slaves in our jurisdiction is beyond imagination deplorable and cruelties are daily practised upon them, especially those of the tenderest age and weaker sex,' adding that 'the misery of domestic bondage, always afflicting enough in itself, is in this town often aggravated by the cruelty of masters.' Like Forbes, however, Jones believed that slave mistreatment was primarily the preserve of other nationalities, saying, 'If I except the English from this censure, it is not through partial affection for my countrymen, but because my information relates chiefly to people of other nations, who likewise call themselves Christians.'[53] Thus, although Jones noted that excusing one type of slavery on the grounds that it was milder than another was 'a most spurious argument for despotism which all despots use', he himself made similar distinctions, distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' masters on grounds of nationality.[54] Of a slave bought by his friend Morris in the West Indies, he noted that this might, 'while the detestable traffic in human creatures exists, be better for the poor man than his liberty, as he would be in danger of losing it again and being sold to a bad master.'[55]

Jones was by his own admission a slave-holder, and the tensions this position created are clearly apparent in his own attempts to reconceptualise both his status and that of his slaves:

> I consider slaves as servants under contract, express or implied, and made either by themselves, or by such persons as are authorised by nature or law to contract for them, until they reach a due age to cancel or confirm any compact that may be disadvantageous to them. I have slaves that I rescued from death and misery, but consider them as other servants, and shall certainly tell them so when they are old enough to comprehend the difference of the terms. Slaves then, as so we must call them, ought not to be treated more severely than servants by the month or by the year, and correction of them should ever be proportioned to their offence; that it should never be wanton or unjust all must agree.[56]

Such ambiguity about the precise status of domestic slaves was not unusual: as Margot Finn notes, the wills of many Anglo-Indian slave-owners contain slips between descriptions of slaves as slaves and as servants, suggesting their 'inability to fix domestic slavery precisely within the world of labour as they understood it'.[57] Jones may not have considered his slaves chattels, but, as S. N. Mukherjee points out, if 'he treated his slaves as his servants, this does not mean he treated them as his equals'.[58] Jones firmly believed in the master's right to use corporal punishment to 'correct' his servants and upheld the owner's authority to discipline his slave. Thus, although it provided a conceptual means of distancing themselves from the troubling status of slave-holder, by reconceptualising domestic slaves as amenable to 'Master and Servant' regulations, Jones upheld a system of coercion that was enforced by physical punishments including flogging. Indeed, Finn suggests that being positioned as domestic servants was doubly disabling for the slaves themselves, for,

> as domestic servants, they were supposedly safely ensconced within the family circle, and thus did not merit abolitionist legislation; as domestic servants too, however, they were subsumed as freely contracting agents within the Master and Servant framework, and thereby (like slaves) were subject to corporal punishment to coerce their labour.[59]

Descriptions of runaway slaves in the colonial press provide glimpses of the casual and socially acceptable physical violence they suffered, as many bore the marks of their 'correction', mistreatment, or simply of their status, upon their bodies. As Barbara Bush-Slimani notes, in the West Indies, renaming, branding and other erasures of identity were crucial to the 'objectification and commodification of the slave body' and some advertisements for the sale or recapture of slaves identified them 'simply by owners' brands'.[60] Indian hue and cry advertisements spoke of Indian, Malay or African slaves with European names such as Wilks, Caesar, Augusto, Polly, Sam or Tom, bearing brands denoting their owner's identity and the scars of physical abuse. Lieutenant J. H. Valentin Dubois, for example, sought the return of two eleven-year-old slaves, both of whom had his initials, VD, inscribed into their flesh above the elbow.[61] Mr Conrad Smith of Chinsurah noted that his errant slave-boy 'Paul' had 'several marks on his body where he has scalded himself'.[62] The little finger of R. Hollier's runaway slave-boy's right hand was 'contracted by being formerly cut', while another boy was said to have a mark under his eye where he had been burned.[63] Indrani Chatterjee notes the case of one slave *ayah* (children's maid) whose hair was shorn, and another who was branded on the forehead with the English word 'Liar'.[64] In 1785, a fourteen-year-old runaway was described as 'A Short, thick set

Slave-boy, with full cheeks, large round head, and a scar on his forehead; dressed in a red and white chintz banyan, blue and white chintz drawers, and three or four scars on his right arm.'[65] As Elizabeth Collingham discusses, servants were incorporated into the body politic of their master's homes by the clothes, liveries and badges of office they were given.[66] Here the boy's connection to the household of his master are indicated through his attire, while his subservient status is implied by the inerasable marks upon his body. Similarly, Din Darah, a fifteen-year-old slave-boy who absconded with some of his master's possessions in 1792 was described as 'marked on the back and arms with the scars of a number of small burns; had an iron ring on one leg, which, though he may have taken off, the chaffing must be discernible; his gait is slow; if confused has an impediment in his speech'. Such poignant indications of this young boy's mistreatment throw into sharp relief the advertisement's claim that if he returned voluntarily his master would 'forgive his offence' and treat him with kindness.[67]

The case of John Clapen Bolt, a German ex-EIC employee who beat his African slave-girl to death in Bimlipatam (Bheemunipatnam), Madras, in 1786, highlights both how slave mistreatment was normalised in European society and the tensions between this and the EIC's desire to limit the slave-holder's coercive power. Bolt had been in the Bombay Marine service until 1781, when he had left and married a Dutchwoman. In August 1786, he dislocated his finger, a misfortune that he blamed on the carelessness of his African slave-girl, whom he consequently had soundly whipped. While this punishment was being administered, Bolt's wife asked a neighbour, Frans Casper, to come and reset her husband's finger. On arriving at Bolt's house, Casper 'saw into his yard that his slave-girl was held fast by somebody at a tree, and had been struck by a cooley with a thin firewood, and [Bolt] was standing by'. Apparently unperturbed by this scene, Casper admitted that he would not have interfered had Bolt's wife not specifically asked him to intercede on the girl's behalf. Bolt, however, refused to relent, saying that 'she had been struck before much worse, and could easily endure the punishment', at which point Casper 'did not stay there three minutes longer, but went out of his house'.[68] Casper's story was corroborated by the coolie, a fisherman called Yelloo, who had been called to Bolt's house by his wife. Once there, 'he found Bolt and the slave-girl, the latter tied up to a tree, and saw the said Bolt beat the girl with a stick'. Having tired himself out, Bolt ordered Yelloo to take over, which Yelloo claimed he initially refused to do. When Bolt threatened to beat him, however, he took the stick and gave the girl several blows. Bolt told him that he was not striking hard enough, and was going to beat him, but Yelloo saw an opportunity of getting away and escaped.[69] The doctor who examined the slave-girl's body reported that 'the negro having been tied to a tree, the knees and breast bearing against it,

received in that position a blow from a piece of wood upon her reins, which having unfortunately disjoined the third vertebrae of the loins and otherwise injured the kidneys, was the cause of her death'.[70] Bolt's open admission that such whippings were a regular occurrence and Casper's muted reaction to the scene both suggest that such violence was socially acceptable in some circles. Local EIC officials, however, believed Bolt had overstepped the bounds of reasonable chastisement and referred the case to the Supreme Court of Judicature in Calcutta, because 'an offence of so flagrant a nature should not pass unregarded'. The case against Bolt was considered conclusive, but he escaped punishment because as a German who was no longer employed by the EIC he was not subject to their jurisdiction.[71] The most the EIC could do was deport him from British India. The actions of EIC officials in this case suggest that they sought a balance between private penal power and the authority of the state over the bodies of slaves in their territories, although their resolution to proceed against Bolt may have been strengthened by his reputation as 'a very bad character', whose removal from British territories was a desirable end in itself.[72]

Brutality against slaves and servants was not uncommon within Anglo-Indian society. Masters were legally entitled to administer 'reasonable' forms of corporal punishment to their servants and their slaves, and were not considered liable even if such 'moderate correction' accidentally resulted in death. The EIC state did place some limits upon the slave-holder's penal power, however, and, unlike in the Caribbean, mistreated slaves in India had recourse to the law. Slave-holders could be punished for the deliberate and premeditated murder of a slave or excessive or unreasonable cruelty towards them. Sir William Jones laid out the limits and extent of the master's authority, saying,

> A master may legally correct his servant with moderation, and with a view to his amendment; nor, if the servant so corrected should die of some misfortune unforeseen and unlikely to happen, would the master be guilty of any crime; but if the correction be immoderate, excessive, unreasonable, cruel, the party may have, if he live, a reparation in damages; or if he die the master will be guilty of manslaughter or murder, according to the circumstances; of manslaughter if he gave the fatal blow in a sudden burst of passion, after violent provocation, with a weapon not likely to kill; of murder if he had full time for deliberation and coolness of blood, and that whether he intended to destroy life, or only to chastise immoderately; for the true sense of malice, to constitute this horrible crime, is malignity of heart, or a disposition to do mischief, which may be ascertained by comparing the fault to the correction, the age and condition of the person stricken with the force of the striker, and the danger of the instrument used by him.[73]

Jones presented these conditions as a deterrent against excessive cruelty towards servants and slaves, but in practice, of course, they also enshrined the master's right to violence in law. The colonial state in India, as Radhika Singha argues, wished to reserve to itself 'the privilege of taking life' and thus stopped short of giving individual slave-holders the monopoly of violence exercised by those of the West Indies. It also, however, sought to uphold the master's domestic authority over the members of his household and operated within an unequal race/class hierarchy that privileged the rights of the white European male over all others. As a result, the protection that the state afforded to slaves was at best uneven and usually ineffective. Charges of cruel treatment or murder of slaves were investigated, but rarely resulted in serious punishments for European slave-holders. Even when it could be proved that a slave had been badly beaten, or brutalised over a long period, premeditation was difficult to prove, especially when striking the fatal blow was of itself insufficient to establish guilt. In 1785, for example, the *India Gazette* reported that an inquest had been held on the death of a native slave-boy belonging to a European Sergeant because 'it was suspected, from some marks on his body, that ill-usage had been the cause of his death'. After examining several witnesses, and two surgeons who inspected the body, the jury acquitted the accused because 'they could not in their conscience pronounce that the boy died of the beating, which it was proved he had received from the Sergeant and his native wife'.[74] The same year, the *India Gazette* reported that John Osborne, 'a native Portuguese' had been apprehended and examined on suspicion of murdering a thirteen-year-old slave-girl. The testimony of several different witnesses 'demonstrated his brutal usage of the girl', as well as substantiating the fact of the murder. The newspaper's coverage of the case suggests the influence of sentimental concern for the welfare of helpless slaves. 'The savage treatment which too often those poor creatures in bondage receive from their masters, must awaken the feelings of every humane mind', the newspaper noted, 'and interest them much in the event of a trial, that may possibly afford an awful lesson to such as have slaves, how they should treat them in future.'[75] Ultimately, however, Osborne escaped with a fine of just 100 rupees, because premeditation for murder could not be proved and 'masters had a right to give their servants moderate correction, and that if by any misfortune or unforeseen accident, the party should afterwards die, the master could not be deemed guilty in the eye of the law.'[76] Thus, while Jones argued for a 'just punishment, not capital' as an example to those who persistently mistreated their slaves, the number of Europeans who were acquitted of any crime after beating their slaves to death, and the paltry nature of the punishments handed out to the few who were convicted, suggest that in practice the domestic authority of the European master prevailed over the state's desire to limit his penal power.[77]

The extent to which extra-judicial violence against Indians was socially and legally sanctioned can be glimpsed from the case of Humphrey Stewart, who was prosecuted in 1785 for beating the local *chowkidar* (night watchman) to death. The *chowkidar*, who was not one of Stewart's direct employees, had been guarding a tent containing Stewart's European cook's slave-boy, when the latter was 'stolen'. Believing the *chowkidar* to be complicit in the theft, Stewart had his servants tie the unfortunate man by his arms to a tree and then repeatedly beat him until he revealed who had taken the boy. This process lasted for several hours and ultimately resulted in the *chowkidar*'s death. The court case, which was covered in the *Indian Gazette*, primarily revolved around whether this punishment represented 'reasonable' or 'excessive' chastisement. The size of the stick used was discussed in detail, with the defence noting that it was no wider than a man's thumb—an apparent reference to the 'rule of thumb' that supposedly allowed British husbands to beat their wives with implements no wider than this appendage.[78] That the beating was staggered over several hours was presented as a sign of Stewart's reasonableness and its long duration blamed not on the white man's intransigence but on the Indian's 'notorious lying, prevarication, and obstinate withholding of the truth'. Thus, although the *chowkidar* was effectively tortured to death for his refusal to divulge the whereabouts of the slave-boy, Stewart was found guilty not of murder, but of manslaughter, and the judge even recommended leniency towards him. Chillingly, the *India Gazette* presented the incident not as one of excessive cruelty but of British moderation. Stewart's only crime, the newspaper maintained, was that he had failed to reign in the 'immoderation' of his Indian servants, who had implemented his 'reasonable' orders with excessive vigour. 'Happy are we', the newspaper declared,

> that this unfortunate accident was pursued with a thorough investigation of the law. It is a serious lesson to every European, not to trust the rod of correction in the hands of servants, destitute of any rational guide, and whose souls are hereditarily tyrannical. It will at the same time refute the illiberal and almost universal opinion of our countrymen at home, of the cruelty allowed of and daily exercised by the English, in this part of the world.[79]

The disparity between ameliorative intentions of the colonial state and the actual level of protection given to slaves is indicative of the problems involved in reconfiguring English law to fit the colonial context. The master's authority over and right to chastise his dependents was a commonplace of the Georgian state; as Leonore Davidoff puts it, 'children, wives and servants [were] under the protection and wing of the Master. He [was] the intermediary to the outside world; he embodied the governing principle within

the household'.[80] Indeed, Sudipta Sen notes that the 'natural liberty' of the English male subject relied heavily on both his rights in property and his patriarchal authority within the home.[81] The British state upheld this authority; servants could be imprisoned with hard labour for up to three months for breaking their contract, and whippings and fines were deeply embedded in employment law.[82] Servants could also, however, also bring their masters before the magistrates for brutal mistreatment, although after 1797 both judges and parliament began to curtail this right, as it was considered disruptive to household authority.[83] In India labour law seems to have developed primarily out of British statute, although there were also some deviations from metropolitan practice. Masters and mistresses guilty of illegally punishing their servants, or withholding wages, could be fined, while servants guilty of breach of contract (desertion, disobedience, insolence, neglect of duty) could be punished by up to four months' imprisonment and twenty-four lashes.[84] While in the West Indies the lack of effective sanctions against brutality towards slaves 'emphasized the difference between enslaved and free, and valorised the slave-holder's private penal power', in India the state limited the master's right to dispense punishment, even while decriminalising the 'accidental' killing of a slave.[85] By allowing slaves to access the courts of law to complain against their mistreatment, or by investigating their deaths, the EIC state conformed to the 'supposed common discipline of all to a single rule of law' epitomised in Britain by the spectacle of trial and punishment. As Michael Mann points out, however, British justice in India was not blind to race/class distinctions, but rather established 'a three tiered legal system to distinguish between white and black offenders and criminal acts of whites against blacks: British delinquents were never sentenced to death for the murder of an Indian.'[86] Thus, although the slave-holder's power in India was not absolute or unchecked, and the Indian slave was invested with sufficient social identity to make them subjects under the law, the uneven functioning of justice within the racial hierarchy of colonial Indian society allowed slave-owners to circumvent the supposed limits on their authority to a considerable degree.

'I would see him hanged': slave resistance, redress and revenge

The Stewart case demonstrates the extrajudicial penal power Europeans exercised over Indians of various social statuses. It is also, however, indicative of resistance by Indian servants and slaves to this monopoly of violence. The *chowkidar*'s refusal to reveal the whereabouts of the slave-boy, for example, may have been the result of ignorance. It may, however, also suggest solidarity with the child, for although Stewart assumed that the

boy had been stolen it is possible that he had absconded from an obviously violent master and found protection in a sympathetic servant class. As the numerous hue and cry advertisements make clear, some slaves expressed resistance to mistreatment, or dissatisfaction at their condition, by running away. Unlike enslaved Africans, local Indian slaves could disappear with relative ease, acquire new work undetected, perhaps accessing support from the wider servant community in the process. Advertisements seeking the return of fugitive slaves reflected these concerns and often sought to guard against runaways finding alternative employment. Many carried requests to the effect that 'no one after the publication of this will employ him',[87] or that 'Should he have engaged himself, or offer to serve any Gentleman, the Owner begs he may be stopped and sent to Custody'.[88] J. H. Valentin Dubois, the Lieutenant who carved his initials into his slave-boys' arms to facilitate their identification, requested that 'if they offer their service to any gentlemen, they will be so kind as examine their arms, keep them, confined, and inform the owner.' Tellingly, Dubois added that a reward of 100 rupees would be given 'to any black man to apprehend and deliver them up', implying, perhaps, that mistreated slaves might find support and succour among the local Indian servant community.[89] Similarly, Darah Din's owner entreated European gentlemen to explain the purport of his advertisement to their servants, 'the reward and pardon in particular', suggesting that he thought servants might assist the obviously mistreated child.[90]

As many of the hue and cry advertisements suggest, slave resistance through flight was often supplemented by more direct acts of retribution, such as stealing money or property. Of course, emphasis on theft as an aggravating feature of a slave's desertion had a strategic utility for the owner, reinforcing their claim for the return of human property through the loss of other material goods, and providing a judicial as well as a proprietary claim over the escaped individual. Some slaves, of course, may simply have taken what they felt was owed or belonged to them, such as wages or liveries, or what they needed to subsist immediately after their escape. Others, however, took items that suggest sophisticated and premeditated expressions of resistance, inflicting significant damage on their owner. In January 1788, for example, a twenty-five-year-old slave-woman called 'Polly' escaped from Elizabeth Wilson, taking with her promissory notes in her mistress's favour worth 4,000 rupees, as well as two gold mohurs, and the written deeds for herself and two other slaves, Augusto and Caesar. It is unlikely that Polly took these items simply to finance her escape; attempting to cash in the promissory notes would have been a speedy route to detection. Possessing her own slave papers might help her to resist return if recaptured, but she could have little direct use for those of the other two slaves. Taking them suggests she was aware of the impact their loss would have on her mistress;

a symbolic rejection of Elizabeth Wilson's authority, not only over Polly herself, but over others in her employ.[91]

Some slaves took measures to exact revenge on their masters without leaving their households. A report in the *Calcutta Gazette* in 1787, for example, suggested that a planned robbery of 'a Gentleman in the Settlement' had been hatched when his slave-girl gave a gang of robbers information about a large sum of money kept in the house. The plot was ultimately foiled, and we can only speculate on the girl's motives for thus endangering her master's property.[92] Even more creative was Mydee, a 'native woman' belonging to Captain Nicholas Arctander, who accused her master of murdering the son of his *syce* (groom) and burying the child's body in the yard. When her story ultimately unravelled, she admitted that she had lied because Arctander cruelly mistreated her and she wanted to see him hanged. Arctander may not have killed the child, but domestic violence was clearly commonplace within his household, and, although Mydee's act of revenge was ultimately unsuccessful, her accusations did result in Arctander's imprisonment while the case was investigated.[93]

Although Arctander was eventually acquitted, Mydee's attempted use of the law to inflict revenge on a cruel master was possible because the EIC state allowed slaves a degree of social identity and subjecthood under the law. This meant that, unlike their counterparts in the West Indies, Indian slaves could, theoretically, access the colonial courts as a channel of resistance. Gaining legal redress against mistreatment was not always possible in practice, however; the functioning of justice was severely tilted in favour of the European master, and, as Sir William Jones put it, 'if the sufferers knew where or how to complain their very complaints may expose them to even harsher treatment—to be tortured if remanded, if set at liberty, to starve.'[94] These potential problems are illustrated by the case of a slave-boy called Jack, reported in the *Calcutta Gazette*. On 17 September 1789, Jack had complained to the British superintendent of police, Mr Motte, about the 'very severe and cruel manner' in which his master, a 'native Portuguese' called Lewis Argutty, treated him. As his complaint appeared well founded, Mr Motte told Jack that he was free to leave Argutty's service and should no longer consider himself his slave. When Argutty's employer interceded, vouching for his character as a 'mild and humane young man', however, Jack was returned to his master, with the promise that he would receive 'more lenient and becoming treatment' in future. Shortly after this, Jack's strangled body was found on the floor of Argutty's house.[95] Argutty absconded and the *Gazette* reported that from this and 'several other concurring circumstances' no doubt remained that Argutty was guilty of the murder.[96] When he appeared before court, however, Argutty was acquitted, no evidence appearing to support the charge.[97]

Jack was doubly failed by the official structures that he attempted to use to resist his oppression, as the colonial authorities neither protected him nor avenged his death, but other slaves used the courts more successfully to exercise resistance. In 1800, for example, the *Bombay Gazette* reported the trial of an unnamed gentleman for the brutal flogging of his slave-girl. The newspaper noted that the affair had been widely discussed and the defendant's actions widely criticised, and that the testimonies on either side of the case did very little to extenuate the reprehensibility of his conduct:

> It had indeed been said that the girl received four or five hundred lashes, whereas it appears that although orders were given to four different men to inflict one hundred lashes each, one of them only inflicted eighty, another thirty and two of them we believe forty each! It had been also reported that she was entirely undressed while the punishment lasted, but it appeared on the trial that only the part of her body on which the punishment was inflicted was denuded. It had also been given out that she had been forced into the water closet but it appears she descended there voluntarily. It is further reported that scalding water had been thrown over her by the defendant's orders, whereas it appears that although he had ordered hot water to be prepared, yet the Mucqua in bringing it to the scene of punishment, threw a quantity of cold water into it, and that when it was thrown over the girl it was not in a state to do her any injury; but a regard for truth compels us to add that it also appeared that the defendant reprimanded the Mucqua and even struck him on account of the water not being hot enough, which the defendant discovered by putting his hand in it.

The defendant justified this extreme extrajudicial punishment by claiming that the girl had stolen money from him. Significantly, however, as she had already been cleared of the theft by the *foujdari* (criminal) court of Calicut, the presiding judge decided that she should be presumed innocent. As a result, the court found that, 'slave as she was admitted to be to the defendant, he had no right whatever to inflict any punishment on her'. The judge went on to remark that

> [the] state of slavery as tolerated under certain limitations and restrictions in this country … implies an authority in the master to inflict moderate chastisement on slaves for domestic offences, such as performing the task assigned them negligently, or sullenly, refusing to perform it, or deserting their master's service without good and sufficient cause. While this unhappy condition of a part of the human species [is] tolerated, under whatever modification … the full benefit of English laws [can] not be extended to them; and … therefore, as they must remain excluded from all participation in many of the blessings which other English subjects enjoy, it was incumbent on the guardians of the laws so far to restrain the authority of the

> proprietors of slaves as protect the latter from all acts of cruelty or unnecessarily severe punishments.[98]

As she had been found innocent of the theft, the only misconduct for which she was punishable was quitting her master's house without permission, and the judge asked the jury to consider 'whether the punishment that was inflicted on the wretched girl was not out of all proportion to the crime and such as the master could not in any case have a right to inflict in any part of the British Asiatic territories.'[99]

As well as contesting mistreatment, colonial legal structures could be used to challenge slave status itself. In the early 1790s, several Indian servants whose European masters had sold them as slaves in St Helena successfully petitioned the EIC authorities for their freedom and passage back to India, sometimes after a decade or more in slavery. Such cases of Indian servants being sold as slaves in other parts of the empire mark a point where private slave-holding intersected with slave-trafficking, in violation of EIC regulations against the export of slaves. As Rosina Visram and more recently Michael Fisher have discussed, Britons leaving India often took Indian servants and slaves with them to serve them on the voyage, or in their new establishments in Britain or elsewhere. Advertisements in the British press for the return of runaway 'black boys' from India indicate that many of these remained, if not actually slaves, legally bound to their master's service.[100] Others were abandoned by their European owners either in Britain or en route there. Michael Fisher notes the case of one such slave, John Ripon, whose remarkable life story saw him travel from India to Britain and the West Indies, before eventually successfully challenging his enslavement on St Helena.[101] The rest of this section, however, focuses on two other Indian slaves, John Cammedy and Kitty Johnson, who likewise found themselves enslaved on St Helena, and on the channels by which they sought to challenge their status and return to their homes and families.

According to his own testimony, John Cammedy, alias John Richmond, had been sold as a slave on St Helena after accompanying a former shipmate of his father, Captain Carr, to England as a servant in 1776. Cammedy's father claimed that he had only allowed his son to accompany Carr on the condition that he would eventually be returned to his family in Bengal, but instead the Captain left the boy with his brother, Revd Carr, chaplain of St Helena, when he landed there in 1777. Believing him to be a slave, the latter sold Cammedy for £50 to Alexander Wright when he left the island for Bengal. In an effort to challenge his newly imposed slave status, Cammedy wrote to the Governor of St Helena to plead his case.[102] Wright, for his part, maintained that when he purchased him, he had thought him a slave and believed the sale legitimate, but added that letters received from Cammedy's

family in Bengal corroborated the enslaved man's story. Cammedy had, he said, been a good servant and, as he believed he was an honest man, he agreed to release him, providing Carr repaid him the purchase price. Cammedy's father in Bengal had also been working to secure his son's release, writing to various people involved in the chain of transactions that had led to his son's enslavement on St Helena. He had, apparently, been told that his son 'was well and had children and did not wish to leave them', but this had not convinced him and, despite the lapse of ten years, he had continued to pursue his son's cause. Significantly, the arguments made by both Cammedy and his father were based not on the iniquity of slavery as an institution but on Cammedy's original status as a free man, who had 'a just right to that freedom of which I have been so long robbed'. Carr, Cammedy complained, had sold him 'without his having any right or title to do so whatsoever', while the father assured his son that Captain Carr 'had not my orders to sell you; it was never my intention that you should be a slave to mankind' and complained that it was unjust for anyone 'to leave or sell a man who was not his own'. Cammedy's father even gave Captain Carr 'a fine boy' as a replacement, suggesting that he was willing to uphold the slavery of others in order to secure the release of his own 'wrongly enslaved' son. Ultimately, with both the Governor of St Helena and the Bengal authorities involved, Carr was ordered to repay the money and Cammedy was released and repatriated to Bengal.[103]

Cammedy's case was mirrored by that of Kitty Johnson, servant of Eliza Fay (Fig. 3), who was arraigned and fined £60 in 1794 for having sold Johnson as a slave on St Helena. In her *Letters from India*, Fay admitted to having left the girl on the island in 1782, because she had 'behaved very ill', although she claimed to have given her as a gift to one Mrs Mason on the express condition that she would not be sold, and that consequently 'no slave paper passed'. After Fay left for England, however, Mr Mason breached this agreement by selling her for £10. When Fay returned to the St Helena on her way to Europe in 1794, she was called before the magistrate and forced not only to refund the original £10 but also to pay £50 for passage back to Bengal for Johnson and her two children. Although Fay herself only notes it briefly as an 'unpleasant affair' that cost her £60, the case caused quite a stir locally.[104] Like John Cammedy's case, Johnson's actions demonstrate the agency that some illegally enslaved Indians were able to exercise to gain redress from individuals via the colonial state. Despite the lapse of twelve years, when she heard that her former mistress had landed on the island she immediately went to the local authorities to present her account of events and seek their intervention on her behalf. Johnson, who claimed to be the daughter of the Governor of Calcutta's groom and a mixed-race woman called Silvia, said she been sent into Fay's service by her godmother, one Peg Chapman,

Figure 3. Eliza Fay, in Egyptian dress, with unnamed female attendant.

and had gone with Fay on the former voyage as a servant. She had been left on the island, she claimed, not for her own bad behaviour but because she knew that Fay had been having adulterous relations with the ship's doctor. Like Cammedy, Johnson had to wait several years for her revenge, but was eventually repatriated to India at Fay's expense, defaming her character in the process.[105] In August 1794, prompted by a number of cases like those of John Ripon, John Cammedy and Kitty Johnson, the EIC issued a proclamation outlawing the 'unlawful and unjust' sale of natives of Bengal on the island. 'Some persons', the Governor-General declared, 'proceeding from India to England have been guilty of selling and disposing of several free inhabitants of these provinces, and other parts of India, as slaves in St Helena.' He would, he declared, see to it that those who have been guilty of 'so disgraceful and cruel a practice' should be convicted and punished. All persons travelling from India to England were obliged to provide a security against these servants being sold or given away as slaves in St Helena or any other settlement, and in early 1795 a bond was introduced to the amount of 1,000 rupees for servants travelling to Europe with their masters to prevent them being sold as slaves.

Unequal unions: sexual and affective relationships

In 1788, the *Calcutta Gazette* carried the following advertisement

> To be Sold, A Slave-girl, a native of Bengal, about Twenty Years of Age, that has been from her youth accustomed to the care of children in an European family. The Said Slave-girl is on the point of lying in, and can be recommended as qualified to become a Nurse. Any person in want of such a Slave, may by addressing a line to the Printer, be informed of further particulars. N.B. The Said Slave-girl constituted part of the Estate of a Gentleman lately dead.[106]

On one level, this advertisement is straightforward, offering for sale a chattel slave suitable for domestic service in a European family. Yet it also hints at the intimacy that could exist between servants and their owners within the colonial home. Not only had this girl spent her youth looking after, and perhaps developing emotional bonds with, European children, she is even offered as a potential physical surrogate for a European mother. As Nupar Chaudhuri discusses, British doctors advised 'memsahibs' against the exertion of breastfeeding their own children in the debilitating Indian climate and, in the absence of European options, most women hired *ammahs*, or Indian wet nurses. Wet-nursing was, of course, socially and medically sanctioned in Britain until about 1870, but the transference of this practice to the colonial context raised issues about racial intimacy, even as it mitigated

concerns about climatic impacts on European bodies. In the Caribbean and American South, white women were warned to be wary of using African slave-women as wet nurses, as 'their milk was racially tainted and corrupt'.[107] In India, the use of local wet nurses was promoted in nineteenth-century domestic manuals, which maintained that 'no infant thrives so well as those fed by these women',[108] although concerns that the 'milk of "native women" might contaminate an English child's character' did begin to emerge mid century, mirroring contemporaneous class concerns about the social origins of British wet nurses, as well as growing racial alienation after the Mutiny.[109] The presence of Indian wet nurses within the Anglo-Indian home was seen as problematic before this, however, and concerns were expressed about the influence that Indian *ammahs* and *ayahs* might achieve. Emma Roberts, writing in the 1830s, believed wet nurses were 'most expensive and troublesome appendages to a family', adding that 'There is no other method in which natives can so rapidly impose upon the European community as that in which their children are concerned."[110]

If her sale as a potential wet nurse placed the above-mentioned slave-girl in a position of domestic intimacy with, as well as subordination to, the European family who owned her, the final sentence of the advertisement further complicates our understanding of her circumstances and relationship with her previous owner. If she was part of the estate of a 'Gentleman lately dead', was it his family she looked after and, if so, why are they not mentioned in the advertisement? Why was she being sold on, away from her young charges? More importantly, who was the father of her impending child? Was she being sold away from an Indian husband or lover, rupturing familial ties and affective bonds, or in order to nullify the stigma of an illegitimate pregnancy? Or were her services to the deceased 'Gentleman' more personal than merely those of a children's maid? Perhaps the 'Gentleman' had a wife and children, and she was simply a domestic slave-*ayah*, who was being sold by the bereaved family before they returned to Europe. Perhaps, however, her relationship to and position within her master's household was more complex, constituting one of what Durba Ghosh calls the 'uncommon families' of late eighteenth-century colonial society.[111] We can, of course, never know the nature of the relationship between this anonymous slave-girl and her master, but the advertisement's ambiguities hint at sexual, and potentially affective, relationships between master and slave that are played out more fully in other sources. Within the domestic economy of the Anglo-Indian household, slaves could be conceptualised as such; being bought, sold, marked, claimed and treated as property by their European owners, but there was also space for more intimate connections, arrangements and relationships.

The social and domestic structures of colonial society in late eighteenth-century India were not as clear-cut as they would later become, and statuses

and identities could be fluid and negotiable. In India, as in the Caribbean, the absence of suitable 'white' women meant that many European men found it both more practical and more economical to form sexual relationships with local or slave-women; Maria Nugent, who spent time in both India and Jamaica, noted that every 'vulgar Scottish Sultan' had his 'black *chère amie*'.[112] In India, the nature of these mixed-race relationships, and of the domestic economies that formed around them, could vary widely, as could the social background and status of the household's various inmates. Some European men married into aristocratic Indian families, taking on an Indian lifestyle along with their high-status Indian brides. Perhaps the most famous of these is James Kirkpatrick, whose love affair with Khair-un-Nissa has been immortalised in William Dalrymple's *White Mughals*. Others, however, developed relationships with local women of less equal status, who might be employed specifically as concubines, or *bibis* (native mistresses), function also as housekeepers, or be bought as slaves. In forming sexual or affective bonds with local women, Europeans in India, as Durba Ghosh discusses, involved themselves in native domestic life and in conjugal and familial relationships that deviated from the respectable ideal of racially exclusive, matrimonially sanctioned monogamy. Such relationships, though not quite socially respectable for the higher orders of Anglo-Indian society, were tacitly sanctioned, if not publicly recognised, at least until the 1790s.[113] As Trevor Burnard points out, in the context of the colonial Caribbean,

> white men gained pleasure and power from their relationships with black women. But, in doing so, they blurred the distinctions between white and black, disrupting the fiction that the black world and the white world were entirely separate. Inter-racial relationships gave black women an entrée into a white world supposedly closed to them.[114]

This statement might also be applied to inter-racial relationships in late eighteenth-century India, as the keeping of Indian servants, mistresses and slaves created lines of patronage and association that radiated out from the European domestic space into the Indian community and blurred the boundaries between the ruling elite and the ruled.[115] The traditional view of nineteenth-century colonial society is one of carefully compartmentalised and clearly delineated 'white' social spaces, represented by 'mansions, grand balls and horseback riding', carefully managed European nuclear families and socially constructed Britishness.[116] Yet, Anglo-Indian society in the formative years of the late eighteenth century often incorporated more complex and racially ambivalent families and identities. Distinctions between master and mistress, servant and slave were thus not always clearly or precisely delineated; within the complex domestic hierarchies of the Anglo-Indian

home, some slaves could become mistresses and even hold slaves of their own. Margot Finn notes the ambiguous position occupied by slave concubines, who were both unequal to British blood-relations, and superior to servants and other bonded household members, especially in issues of inheritance. She uses the example of Michael Fennell's will, filed in Madras, to demonstrate their 'unstable perch at once within and without the Anglo-Indian family'. Fennell left his estate, in the first instance, to his wife Anna, but ordered that should she die before him it was to pass to his 'Slave-girl Catherina'. Neither Catherina nor her daughter Aurellia was manumitted by the will, however, meaning that they appeared in it 'successively as potential chattel for sale at auction by his heirs and principal legatees of his substantial fortune'.[117]

As Durba Ghosh points out, roughly one-third of sexual cohabitations between European men and native women in late eighteenth-century India 'emerged as part of the master–servant contract between men and their housekeepers, maidservants and slaves'.[118] Thomas Williamson, whose *India Vade Mecum* contains a section on Indian mistresses, hinted at this connection between domestic labour and sexual accessibility, saying of the women kept by European men,

> [the] small portion not of the former sect [Muslims] are Portugueze. These latter prove, in many instances, very good house-keepers; looking after the disbursements with great acuteness, and, on a thousand occasions, shewing more promptness, and more fitness for such an employment. They are remarkably fond of rearing poultry and swine; in which they certainly succeed. But there is a certain something about this description of women, which few are partial to, and which I never could tolerate.

Some relationships between Europeans and their Indian *bibis*, servants or slaves developed into affective ones, but many were coloured by rape, violence or the commodification of the sexual exchange. Williamson discussed the substantial costs involved in keeping an Indian mistress in terms of pre-negotiated contractual obligations that might include money, gifts and the provision of two or three female domestic attendants in return for sexual services. These secondary servants, or slaves, might also be sexually accessible to the master, or others within the household, often on less advantageous terms. Ghosh notes the case of William Orby Hunter, whose sexual relationship with a slave-girl belonging to his native mistress prompted the slighted *bibi* to cut off the tips of the girl's nose and ears and keep her in chains.[119] Similarly, when in 1805 Zuhooran, an eight-year-old slave-girl belonging to a woman in the service of 'an English gentleman', was raped by another servant, a tailor called Myn, her mistress tied her up with a cord and poured hot oil on the girl's genitals, leading to her conviction for

cruelty.[120] Clearly, some sexual relationships between owners and their slaves were the violent/violating product of master's coercive power of ownership over the slave body, common in many slave-holding colonial settlements, especially when female domestic slaves lived in close proximity to their white masters.[121] In other cases, however, master–slave relationships were reimagined in terms of conjugal devotion and romantic attachment, rather than coercion and unequal power.[122] Of course, as Kristina Straub points out, intimate relationships between masters and servants were not confined to the colonial context, as in eighteenth-century Britain the 'gendered and sexual relations that we, from our modern perspective, usually associate with privacy and the family tended to overlap with contractual agreements and labour relations that we more comfortably associate with the public sphere'.[123] Yet the exercise of colonial domination and the emerging imperatives of British rule created a specific socio-political context in which such relationships between raced/classed subjects functioned.

The slave-girl mentioned at the start of this section was being sold as part of her deceased master's effects, suggesting that whatever her relationship with him during life she was not considered anything other than property after his death. Some other slaves, however, received treatment on their master's demise that suggests renegotiated positions within the household, including claims of affection and responsibility. On his death, David Dean, an EIC mariner, manumitted his slave-girl Sofia, bought her a house and left her a lump sum that would provide a monthly income for both her and their daughter, suggesting an affective connection had developed between them.[124] Another such apparently intimate master–slave relationship, discussed in depth by Durba Ghosh, is that between Robert Grant, brother of the more famous EIC servant Charles Grant, and a teenage girl named Zeenut, whom he purchased in Faizabad in 1776. Ghosh provides a detailed analysis of this relationship, drawn from Grant's own account given in his will, which will be summarised here.

According to Grant, Zeenut was the daughter of Shiek Mianulla of Patna. After her father's death, Zeenut had become ill and, with her mother's consent, was taken for treatment in Gyzapoor by her paternal uncle. This uncle, however, was an inveterate gambler and sold her at auction in order to pay off his debts. Grant bought her and once Zeenut recovered her health they entered into a sexual relationship, although Grant claimed he only found out about her life story and relatively high social origins two years after buying her. Zeenut had at least one pregnancy, which ended in a miscarriage at eight months. About this time her mother died and her sister came to find her, but Zeenut refused to leave Grant, or to accept the family jewels that her sister offered her. While Grant interpreted her refusal to leave him as loyalty and affection, Ghosh questions whether returning to

her family was really an option for Zeenut, who was probably pregnant with Grant's child at the time. Her sexual liaison with Grant would have brought dishonour on her family, and Ghosh notes that although Grant offered to let her go Zeenut said she could not return to her family and that 'they were not desirous of this'.[125] We can never really know what Zeenut thought, or how she interpreted her situation, of course, as white accounts of slave subjectivity such as Grant's are, as Hilary Beckles observes, 'internally organised by patriarchal mobilisations of gender ideologies'.[126] Zeenut's story, and the manner in which Grant recounts it, is revealing, however, not only of the way in which sexual relationships might function as survival strategies for the enslaved but also how European men sought to rationalise and legitimise relationships that were not entirely acceptable. As in the Caribbean, attractive slave-women might use their sexuality as a way to gain limited and conditional influence over white men, material favours, better treatment and perhaps even manumission for themselves and their children.[127] This is not to suggest, of course, that acts of sexual violence and coercion were not common, or to imply that in the context of master–slave relationships women ever exercised their choice completely freely, but rather that they in some cases worked within extremely unequal power relations to extract various benefits and concessions. Moreover, although some women, such as Zeenut, or David Dean's slave Sofia, mentioned above, might have gained a degree of economic and social independence from their positions as wives in practice, if not in name, this does not imply that they enjoyed a degree of equality with their white owners. As Sudipta Sen points out, marriage was a highly hierarchical and patriarchal institution in both British and Indian societies, and a husband's power over his wife, as over other members of his household, was considerable.[128] A slave-wife might gain affection, but she was unlikely to achieve parity in the domestic hierarchy of the home.

Ghosh interprets Grant's retelling of Zeenut's biography in the will as an effort both to ensure that she had some financial provisions after his death and to 'legitimise and make explicit his relationship with her to his family in England as well as his friends in India', who might have been surprised by his liaison with a native slave.[129] As Ghosh points out, Grant's account underscores the tensions between interracial relationships, social acceptability and respectable masculinity, as well as the unequal power relations inherent in many apparently affectionate conjugal relationships. In recounting this tale, and emphasising both her devotion and his affection for a woman who he specifically refers to as 'not handsome', Ghosh suggests that Grant was trying to rationalise a relationship which was 'highly unequal, not respectable (in his own eyes), and perhaps not worthy of his stature as a high ranking soldier'.[130] Grant strongly denied any suggestion that he used 'force or seduction', perhaps seeking to exorcise the 'spectre of violence' inherent in master–slave

sexual relationships.[131] As Burnard points out for the Caribbean, however, the powerlessness of slave-women meant that violent rape and coercive mechanisms of sexual manipulation were little different in reality, and suggestions of truly consensual sexual relationships are highly problematic at best.[132] Yet they also offered opportunities. Zeenut's shifts from respectable native lady to slave, to mistress and beneficiary in Grant's will suggests that in the eighteenth century slaves and servants were not born, but made. In the eighteenth century, class, race and gender were not inherent and essential, but performed, socially determined and provisional, and even slaves could sometimes move in and out of their chattel status.[133] Grant's need to justify his relationship with Zeenut and his emphasis on her original status thus suggests not only raced concerns, but also classed ones, reflecting wider eighteenth-century preoccupations with the master–servant relationship.[134]

Another master–slave relationship, touched on by Ghosh, which highlights the reluctance of European men to call a slave 'a slave' in these circumstances, is that of the French military adventurer Claude Martin and his slave-girl, Boulone Lise, whom he claimed to have loved 'as the most chaste and virtuous wife'.[135] Narrating the story of Boulone in his will, Martin echoes Grant in emphasising romantic attachment over slave status, and emphasising her education, virtue and chastity in the face of the usual stereotype of the native mistress:

> I acquired her for the consideration of a sum I paid to one Carriere, a Frenchman, who had acquired her by purchase from a cruel and inhuman father and mother of her; she was at that time an infant of about nine years of age, in the year 1775, which luck made her fall to my lot. I brought her up as a child I loved, and I her educated with all the tenderness of a father, took proper people to learn her principle of her religion, and learned her great modesty and decency, and to read and write, for when at age of reason she should choose any one at her pleasure for either husband or companion. As I proposed to marry her to any one of her cast if she chose it, she choosed never to quit me … according I keep her, and as she has always (been) extremely attached to me, I have endeavoured to make her as happy as I had it in my power, and I have every reason to praise her conduct, character of chastity and modesty; and I may say (to) her credit, that since we lived together since the year 1775, we never had word of bad humour one against another. I also can't enough praise her good example of religion to her servants and to every one about her; and tho' her father and mother so cruelly disposed of her, she has been remarkable for her humanity and generosity toward them and toward her several sisters and other relations. For all her good qualities I sincerely pray to God that she may receive her proper reward, and to make her happy wherever she may be. I do not intend to put any restriction on her future conduct, giving her full liberty to marry if she chose to do it and though she

> may be married, her pension must be continued to her as also any other acts of gifts donation is to be continued for as long as she live.[136]

Although Boulone was clearly his favourite, and an oil painting of her hung in the blue room in his mansion, St Martiniere, in Lucknow, Martin also had several other women to whom he bequeathed legacies. 'I have acquired them', he stated in his will,

> not as we term slaves, though paid a consideration for, but the sum I paid was a present to the relations, that I might have had a right on them as not to be claimed by anybody; and those I acquired for to be the companion of my good or bad fortune, and they were to be with me for life. I had them when in their childhood, and I had them educated as virtuously as I could; they have fulfilled my intention to my great satisfaction.[137]

Martin's biographer Samuel Hill notes that no children were born in Martin's house, and on this basis asserts that his relationship with these women must have been chaste, and their incorporation into his 'native establishment' a way of providing for them respectably. Some of these women were, apparently, mixed-race daughters of Martin's friends, who had been abandoned by their European fathers; Martin expressly tells us that one girl, called Sally, was the child of Colonel Harper and that he provided for some females connected with Colonel Polier.[138] 'Can anyone,' Hill asks, 'who knows anything of native life, suppose that, had their connection with Martin been any but the tie of affection, these women would have been faithful to a man who set them the example of vice?'[139] More recently, however, Rosie Llewellyn-Jones has suggested that these women were Martin's mistresses in the conventional sense.[140] Ghosh argues that the emphasis on the sentimental and emotional dimensions of the master–slave sexual relationships described by Grant and Martin 'explained and legitimated relationships that were considered illegitimate, vastly unequal, and racially transgressive'.[141] While such a narration allows these European men to refashion the purchase of a slave as a rescue fantasy, Ghosh points out that there is little question of where the power lay in a hugely unequal relationship, but that 'dramatically unequal social status undermined, rather than supported a man's masculinity, and many men were careful to spell out that their slaves were not really slaves'. By stressing their high birth, and emphasising their subsequent education, chastity and virtue, the slave partner could be reimagined as a respectable woman whose social status was more in keeping with that of her paramour.[142]

Personal domestic slaves were not the only enslaved individuals with whom Europeans might have intimate relationships. As several EIC officials noted, many of the young girls employed in brothels and dancing troupes in colonial India had been purchased from their parents, or bought from

slave-dealers or auctions and were effectively slaves. In 1812, for example, N. J. Halhed, Acting Magistrate of Agra, noted that the *nautch* (dancing) women arriving from foreign provinces often brought with them 'girls who have been bought by them and are *bona fide* slaves'.[143] EIC attitudes to such sexual slavery will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but for now it is sufficient to comment that *nautch* performances were a popular part of Anglo-Indian life in the late eighteenth century, although they became less popular in the nineteenth century, while recourse to prostitution remained endemic for European troops and others in colonial India. While some successful prostitutes and *nautch* girls might use their alternative lifestyle as a means to social and economic independence, acquiring a degree of autonomy and power denied to most Indian women in conventional domestic roles, others were enslaved and European patronage of dancing troops and brothels made them directly or indirectly complicit in this form of bondage.

Conclusion

In the final decades of the eighteenth century, the growth of evangelical morality and middle-class bourgeois propriety intersected with the emerging political and pragmatic imperatives of a colonial state in India that was increasingly concerned with rehabilitating its reputation at home and reinforcing its racial and political superiority in India. The interventions against slave-trading under Cornwallis occurred contemporaneously with shifting EIC policies that increasingly discouraged interracial relationships. In Britain, evangelicals and abolitionists were increasingly highlighting West Indian planters' sexual immorality and unions with African slaves as proof of the godless nature of a slave society and the moral bankruptcy of the system, with the result that although such relationships certainly did not cease they became increasingly socially taboo.[144] As Burnard points out,

> when a sexual union resulted in children who were neither properly white nor properly black, then the strict lines demarcating black from white, slave from free, became clouded. Sexual contact, therefore, was an important area in which the public transcript, to use James C. Scott's phrase, of what relations between black and white should be did not match the hidden transcripts of the real relationships between blacks and whites created in the privacy of the bedroom, curing house or canefield.[145]

In India, what Sudipta Sen refers to as the 'decline of intimacy' between Europeans and Indians reflected fears about the growth of a 'Creole class' that might undermine British racial and political dominance, although it was also motivated by more mercurial concerns about the impact that the

incorporation of 'native born' sons of European officers into the EIC's service had on the levels of patronage that EIC Directors in Britain could command.

When exactly the right for Europeans in British India to hold slaves was abolished is unclear; specific references to European slave-holding are rare after the turn of the nineteenth century, although they do appear occasionally in wills and probates. Margot Finn notes that Elizabeth Clayton's domestic servants were unambiguously slaves until formally emancipated by her in 1824.[146] When, in 1811, one Mr Murdoch Brown sought to assert his right to hold agricultural slaves on his plantation at Anjarakandy on the basis that it was allowable under the Muslim law, the Advocate General William Thackeray's response clearly indicated that slave-holding was no longer considered to be a British prerogative in India.[147] Thackeray noted that Britons in India 'retain the rights of their birth, and ought also to retain all the relations connected with the British character, to which it is equally abhorrent to be the master of slaves as to endure slavery', and suggested that 'experience from another quarter of the world' as well as reason propounded that the exercise of authority of masters over slaves is 'peculiarly destructive to the national honour and character'. He added that he saw nothing in the laws of India or in the statutes that allowed for a departure from the laws of England in terms of the relationship between a British subject and his servants. He noted, however, that it was not a clear point and that it was one that might usefully be settled, and proposed that freedom could be offered to any one of Brown's slaves who might choose to leave his service in order that this question could be tried.[148] In the nineteenth century, however, most British discussions of slavery in India were conducted in the context of indigenous systems, trades and domestic and agricultural economies, as we will see in the next part.

Notes

1 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), p. 10.

2 Margot Finn, 'Slaves out of Context: Domestic Slavery and the Anglo-India Family, *c.*1780–1830', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series 19.1 (2009): 196.

3 Barbara Bush-Slimani, 'Hard Labour: Women, Childbirth and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies', *History Workshop* 36 (1993): 85.

4 Ibid., p. 88.

5 Bernard S. Cohn, 'The British in Benares: A Nineteenth Century Colonial Society', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4.2 (1962): 169.

6 E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800–1947* (Oxford: Polity, 2001).

7 Cohn, 'The British in Benares', p. 171.

8 Ibid., p. 182.

9 Ibid.

10 Swati Chattopadhyay, 'Blurring Boundaries: The Limits Of "White Town" in Colonial Calcutta', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 59.2 (2000): 154–79.
11 Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, pp. 15–18.
12 Cited ibid., p. 21.
13 Ibid., p. 18.
14 Cohn, 'The British in Benares', p. 183.
15 Ibid.
16 James Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs* (London: 1813), p. 101.
17 Ibid.
18 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 3, issue 63 (12 May 1785).
19 *India Gazette*, vol. 1, issue 15 (24 Feb. 1781).
20 Ibid., vol. 2, issue 54 (24 Nov. 1781).
21 Ibid., vol. 2, issue 89 (27 July 1782).
22 Finn, 'Slaves out of Context', p. 187.
23 The *India Gazette* in 1785, for example, carried the advert 'Wanted: A young active Slave-boy'. *India Gazette*, vol. 5, issue 217 (10 Jan. 1785).
24 Ibid., vol. 3, issue 107 (30 Nov. 1782).
25 *Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, issue 11 (8 Apr. 1780).
26 Ibid., issue 2 (3 Feb. 1781).
27 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 11, issue 271 (7 May 1789).
28 Ibid., vol. 4, issue 84 (6 Oct. 1785), p. 6.
29 *India Gazette*, vol. 1, issue 28 (26 May 1781).
30 Ibid., vol. 5, issue 230 (11 Apr. 1785).
31 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 11, issue 27 (17 May 1789).
32 *India Gazette*, vol. 1, issue 20 (30 Mar. 1781).
33 *Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, issue 48 (1782).
34 *Calcutta Review*, vol. 35 (1860), pp. 217–18.
35 *Bombay Courier*, vol. 2, issue 32 (1793).
36 PP 1828, p. 97.
37 Ravi Ahuja, 'Labour Relations in an Early Colonial Context: Madras, *c.*1750–1800', *Modern Asian Studies* 36.4 (2002): 804.
38 For more on the European slave trade in the Indian Ocean, see Richard B. Allen, 'Satisfying the "Want for Labouring People": European Slave-trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850', *Journal of World History* 21.1 (2010): 45.
39 See Jeanette Pinto, *Slavery in Portuguese India, 1510–1842* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1992).
40 Pedro Machado, 'A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave trade, *c.*1730–1830', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 24.2 (2003): 26–7.
41 Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs*, p. 167.
42 Ibid.
43 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 4, issue 101 (9 Feb. 1786).
44 PP 1828, p. 10.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., p. 13.
47 Richard B. Allen, 'Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave-trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830', *William and Mary Quarterly* 66.4 (2009): 877.

48 *Calcutta Chronicle*, vol. 4, issue 171 (30 Apr. 1789).
49 Ibid., vol. 5, issue 225 (13 May 1790).
50 See Finn, 'Slaves out of Context'.
51 V. de Sola Pinto, 'Sir William Jones and English Literature', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 11.4 (1946): 686–94.
52 Franklin Edgerton, 'Sir William Jones: 1746–1794', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 66.3 (1946): 235.
53 PP 1828, pp. 9–10.
54 S. N. Mukherjee, 'A Note on Sir William Jones and the Slave Trade in Bengal', *Bengal: Past and Present* 82 (1963): 109.
55 Ibid., p 110.
56 PP 1828, pp. 10.
57 Finn, 'Slaves out of Context', p. 192.
58 Mukherjee, 'A Note on Sir William Jones', p. 110.
59 Finn, 'Slaves out of Context', pp. 201–2.
60 Barbara Bush-Slimani, '"Sable Venus", "She Devil" or "Drudge"? British Slavery and the "Fabulous Fiction" of Black Women's Identities, 1650–1838', *Women's History Review* 9.4 (2000): 767.
61 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 2, issue 40 (23 Nov. 1784), p. 6.
62 *India Gazette*, vol. 2, issue 85 (29 June 1782).
63 Ibid., vol. 5, issue 230 (11 Apr. 1785).
64 Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 3.
65 *India Gazette*, vol. 5, issue 232 (25 Apr. 1785).
66 Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, p. 19.
67 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 17, issue 437 (10 July 1792).
68 PP 1828, p. 466.
69 Ibid., p. 467.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., p. 464.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., p. 9.
74 *India Gazette*, vol. 5, issue 238 (6 June 1785).
75 Ibid., vol. 5, issue 237 (30 May 1785).
76 Ibid., vol. 5, issue 239 (13 June 1785).
77 PP 1828, p. 10.
78 This ruling has been attributed to Judge Francis Buller, and was satirised in Gilray's cartoon *Judge Thumb*, of 1782, although there is no evidence that the ruling exists, or that this was the true origin of the term.
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92 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 7, issue 177 (19 July 1787).
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123 Kristina Straub, *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism, and Violence between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 2.
124 Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, p. 118.
125 Ibid., p. 115.
126 Bush-Slimani, 'Sable Venus', p. 763.
127 Ibid., p. 770.
128 Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, p. 133.
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130 Ibid., p. 116.
131 Ibid.
132 Burnard, 'The Sexual Life', p. 176.
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134 Ibid., p. 5.
135 Cited in Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, p. 117.
136 Samuel Charles Hill, *The Life of Claud Martin: Major-General in the Army of the Honourable East India Company* (Calcutta: Thacker, 1901), pp. 132–3.
137 Ibid., p. 131.
138 In a letter to General de Boigne, Claude Martin noted the arrangements for the deceased Henry Martin's slave-girl: 'I hope after the sale of his effects there was enough to have the wherewithal to marry off the girl or drudge that he had, who ought not and must not be a slave and I suppose she was that. If Henry Martin has not disposed of that which belongs to him, I am of the opinion to set her free and marry her off if possible. Or else give her something and that she should go where seems suitable to her. In case it amounts to nothing, see, and I pray you have 100 rupees given to her so she can return to her family, under your protection, until then.' Claude Martin and Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *A Man of the Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century India: The Letters of Claude Martin, 1766–1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 198.
139 Hill, *The Life of Claud Martin*, pp. 130–3.
140 Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, 'Claude Martin—"A Very Ingenious Man"', *Asian Affairs* 30.2 (1999): 170.
141 Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, p. 117.
142 Ibid.
143 PP 1828, pp. 146–7.
144 Burnard, 'The Sexual Life', p. 184.
145 Ibid., pp. 180–1.
146 Finn, 'Slaves out of Context', p. 193.
147 The case of Mr Brown and his slaves is discussed in full in Chap. 5, below.
148 PP 1828, p. 147.

III

Indian Slaveries

Introduction: Locating Indian Slaveries

In March 1808, J. Richardson, EIC magistrate for Bundlekhund, wrote a detailed letter to the local judicial authorities in which he advocated the suppression of slavery throughout the EIC's territories. His intervention on this 'subject of great importance to the cause of humanity, policy, morals and religion' was prompted by the British parliament's recent 'humane abolition of the slave trade', which, he remarked, had 'added lustre to the enlightened wisdom on the British senate, and enrolled, to the latest posterity, the name of Wilberforce amongst the benefactors of mankind'.[1] Richardson, who was clearly influenced by abolitionist sentiment and Smithian ideas about free labour as the most efficient and rational method of capitalist production, put forward a comprehensive case for suppressing slavery, on both principled and practical grounds, arguing for a ban on the buying and selling of slaves, and for a declaration making all children born to slaves in India after a certain date free. Although the judges of the Nizamat Adalat, the chief criminal court of the Bengal Presidency, were initially moved by his letter to collect detailed opinions on the legal status of slavery from their Hindu and Muslim advisers, and even asked Richardson to outline his thoughts on how to ameliorate the practice in the light of these, the resulting draft regulation was not forwarded to government until 1816. The official explanation for this delay was 'the difficulty of the subject, as well as the pressure of other business'[2]—Indrani Chatterjee believes that Richardson's minute was deliberately suppressed as too problematic.[3] Instead, although they espoused a rhetoric of freedom that supposedly defined EIC rule in India and set it apart from both the oppressive regime of its Mughal predecessors and the slave system of British colonies in other parts of the world, in practice EIC officials at most levels of government tended to uphold the right of Indian proprietors to their slaves. These rights, they argued, were sanctioned by Hindu and Muslim laws and were necessary to the smooth running of the country and successful collection of the revenue.

Most historians now agree that the EIC's eventual delegalisation of slavery in their territories came as a direct result of abolitionist pressure from Britain after 1833, not as a result of any EIC commitment to anti-slavery reform. As Radhika Singha points out, 'The Charter Act [1833] had vested the Company with greater prestige by virtue of a closer association with parliamentary authority, but it also forced the administration to assuage "the moral feelings of Englishmen" in the matter of slavery.'[4] Prior to 1833, however, few abolitionists in Britain were engaged with the idea of Indian slavery as a problem in need of colonial reform; indeed, as we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8, the idea of Indian slavery was deeply problematic for abolitionists in the 1820s and few wished to turn their attention to it. Most were willing to accept that while there were various socio-religious problems in India, EIC rule meant there was 'little or no real slavery' there.[5] Thus, although the EIC was occasionally obliged to engage with metropolitan legislation such as the Slave Felony Act of 1811, much of the debate on slavery and slave-trading that took place in India in the first three decades of the nineteenth century was conducted in the context of the local imperatives of colonial governance rather than as a result of dictates from Britain. Indeed, the official correspondence on Indian slavery produced by the EIC in the decades before 1833, as contained in the 1828 Parliamentary Papers, became the main source of supposedly 'empirical' information on Indian slavery for abolitionists in Britain. Constructions of Indian slavery in the early nineteenth century were the product of a bi-directional flow of information and ideas; colonial officials like Richardson were certainly influenced by metropolitan anti-slavery debates, but abolitionists and evangelicals also drew heavily on colonial sources for their information about Indian labour conditions.

Despite the initial lack of direct abolitionist interest in India, debates about the extent to which the colonial state should intervene to limit, regulate or reform slave-trading and slavery on the subcontinent took place throughout the 1810s and 1820s. These debates had to consider local conditions and the expediencies of colonial stability, while at the same time negotiating how the metropolitan legislation criminalising the traffic in human beings could best be reconfigured and applied in the Indian context. In the process, colonial officials had to reconcile discursive imperatives that constructed EIC rule in India as benevolent and progressive (the antonym of both 'oriental despotism' and the slave system of their West Indian compatriots) with the pragmatic imperatives of colonial rule. Thus, while colonial officials consistently couched their discussions in a language that conflated anti-slavery with civilised, modern values, in practice many baulked at the potential consequences of interference in local Indian forms of bondage. One

circuit court judge summed up the contradiction between ideological/ethical attitudes to slavery and pragmatic considerations of government, noting that

> [to] see men, women and children brought to the publick market place and sold for a less sum than would purchase a Cat or a Dog is certainly in a moral sense to be regretted and *though … motives of policy may forbid the interference of the Legislature*, it does not render the practice the less inconsistent with the principles of a British Government or the less at variance with the benevolence of the Christian Religion.[6]

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, in the late eighteenth century the EIC under Cornwallis had constructed itself discursively as 'anti-slavery', couching its attack on European slave-trafficking in its territories in terms of humanitarian concern with the welfare of its subjects, even while its actions were primarily driven by pragmatic political imperatives. While the focus of their legislative endeavours was on the activities of other European nations, intervention to prevent the trade could be justified quite easily as protecting the rights and persons of their subjects against foreign interlopers. By the early nineteenth century, however, the threat from other European powers had diminished, and the slave trades and slaveries with which they were confronted were local Indian ones. Under these circumstances, EIC policy had to reconcile its professed anti-slavery sentiment with the need to protect the property rights of all classes of its Indian subjects, including the slave-owning Indian elite on which it depended for the maintenance of its rule.[7]

The EIC was not unaware of indigenous slave trades and slaveries in the late eighteenth century, of course. Cornwallis's regulation of 1789 referred to the trade as carried on by 'many natives and a few Europeans' and there are cases, tucked away among those dealing with European infringements of the ban, of Indian slave-traders and procurers being punished by the colonial state in the 1790s. In Malabar, in April 1793, for example, two natives of Tellicherry (Thalassery) were flogged through the bazaar and then transported to the Andamans for the offence of decoying children and selling them as slaves.[8] Similarly, that same year, a woman called Shazaddee, and her accomplice Dennah, were publicly flogged in the bazaar and sentenced to one year's imprisonment for kidnapping at least four children aged between eight and twelve years, with the intention of selling them into slavery. Senior Judge R. Bathurst protested against the leniency of this sentence on the basis that their crime was 'of a nature to break asunder the tenderest ties, and consign its innocent victims, either rudely torn, or cruelly seduced from their parents' home, to hopeless slavery, to experience in the course of it, too probably, no wages but stripes, no relief but death.'[9] Yet, although the punishments inflicted on Indians accused of slave-trafficking were harsher than

the nominal sentences handed out to European slavers, the disproportionate number of European cases in the records before 1800 reveals that EIC policy was concerned primarily with stemming the European export trade, rather than fundamentally altering the conditions of indigenous slavery in India. Where slavery and slave-trading received the tacit sanction or protection of local Indian elites, little was done. In 1792, for example, a Mr James Rees of Serampore reported that the agents of local *zamindars* (local magnates and large landholders) were engaged in 'seizing a number of unhappy wretches at different times, and carrying them to be sold as slaves to several chiefs, or heads of bawds or harlots and others; and also, for a trifling sum paid to them, will grant, or cause to be granted, a writing vouching for the purchasing and disposing of them', adding that 'this infernal trade of human blood goes on briskly and openly, without the least apprehension of being called to account'.[10] Of course, as we have seen in the previous chapter, many European slave-traders relied on local Indian networks to procure their cargoes. Indeed, although it has suited the internal logic of this book to divide the chapters between European and Indian forms of slavery and slave trades in India, as this reflects the chronological shift in focus within EIC debates before and after 1800, it should be stressed that this is not intended to imply that European and Indian slave trades operated within separate circuits of supply and demand. European traders tapped into existing Indian networks, which both pre-dated and survived the end of the European trade in the region.

EIC officials debated the nature of local relationships of obligation and dependence in India, using the rubric of slavery, from the very beginning of their political rule in the subcontinent. As early as 1774, local officials in Dacca were questioning the application of recent regulations in the local context, asking in particular whether the law prohibiting the enslavement of 'free' persons should be extended to the children of slaves.[11] This enquiry prompted the government of Bengal to request a report as to the nature and extent of slavery in Sylhet and other frontier regions of Bengal. As would be the case throughout the early nineteenth century, their interest in the custom was linked directly to the specific contingencies of their rule, as the officials were asked to report in particular on forms of slavery that were 'in general usage, or in anyway connected with, or likely to have influence on, the cultivation or revenue'.[12] The terms in which the response to this inquiry was couched reflected what would become significant trends in the way EIC officials thought about and discussed slavery in India, delineating between Hindu and Muslim forms of slavery, while admitting that both were 'considered in the same light as any other property, and are transferable by the owner, or descend, at his demise, to his heirs'. It also outlined different routes into slavery, noting that many hereditary slaves had become so as a result of their ancestors' capture during the Muslims' invasions of the

region, while others were bondsmen of more recent making, having sold themselves or their children in times of famine. Various conditions of labour and lived experiences also apparently existed for the enslaved. Palanquin bearers, for example, were said to be slaves in that they 'belonged' to others, but were allowed to 'inter-marry; labour for themselves, and act at their own discretion, the same as if no such nominal bondage subsisted'. In the *moffusil* (countryside) some older families apparently kept hereditary slaves and their descendants to cultivate their land and for menial domestic work, but it was noted that in the city few people chose to keep slaves, because their work was considered indifferent, yet they were as expensive as other sorts of servants. The exception to this was the female slaves who were 'of more use in families, none being without them'. Female domestic slavery, it was argued, was 'consistent with the manners of a country where women are kept in continual retirement, and such privacy observed in regard to them, as would be much affected by a frequent change of servants'. On this basis, the EIC officials concerned did not think that an alteration in the state of slavery would have any impact on the cultivation or revenue.[13]

As the above account of slavery in Sylhet suggests, EIC discussions of slavery and slave-trading incorporated a number of different routes into bondage and different labour conditions and lived experiences for the enslaved. Thus, although many EIC officials explored the issue within the framework of broadly anti-slavery sentiments and ideologies, referring to the slave trade as a 'nefarious traffic' and slavery as an 'odious institution', in practice their attitudes to slavery and slave-trading varied depending on their assessment of the local context of labour relations and traditions of obligation, the kind of slavery in question and the political and practical imperatives of colonial rule in a particular district or region. Colonial officials made a number of clear and sometimes arbitrary distinctions between different forms of bondage; they delineated between the issues posed by slave-trafficking as a potentially criminal and destabilising practice and slavery as a 'traditional' institution supported by Hindu and Muslim laws, addressing aspects of the former as early as the 1810s, while resisting metropolitan pressure to intervene decisively on the latter until well after 1833. Within this dichotomy were further divisions. Discussion of various slave trades in India differentiated between those carried out through illegal violence, coercion or kidnapping, which clearly posed a law and order issue for the colonial state, and the somehow more acceptable sale of self or children during times of famine or distress. Moreover, many different types of slavery or slave-like statuses were recognised, discussed and considered to require quite different remedies, if any at all. EIC officials clearly distinguished between agricultural slavery, domestic slavery and the immoral commerce in women for prostitution, although these broad

categories were cross-cut by an array of local practices and experiences. As a result, the attitudes and interpretations of local officials discussing their own regions could be quite varied, but by the time they reached the higher levels of EIC hierarchy, and were channelled back to Britain, they had largely been configured to perform a certain set of discursive functions. These structured Indian slavery in specific ways and represented them as conforming to specific characteristics that reinforced EIC policy imperatives.

In his letter to the Nizamat Adalat of 1808, Richardson had declared that 'the effects of slavery are as plainly injurious as the benefits of freedom are obvious and undoubted'.[14] Yet this apparently self-evident proposition was problematic in the Indian context. The specific features of Indian enslavement, various hazards and uncertainties of freedom, and the imperatives of a colonial state that needed to maintain rather than challenge certain relationships of obligation and dependence, led many colonial officials to question this dichotomy. Abolitionist pressure on the EIC to 'reformulate the cultural and symbolic component of rule' by outlawing slavery increased after 1833, but many colonial officials continued to consider this 'inappropriate to the political agenda in India', and, as Singha points out, 'an influential current of opinion within the Indian administration remained unconvinced about the advantages of embracing what Gyan Prakash terms the juridical discourse of freedom and voluntary contract'.[15] Domestic slavery, which was deemed the prevalent type in north India, was considered quite a different proposition from plantation slavery on the West Indian model, and raised concerns about the sanctity of the Indian family and the Indian home. The kidnapping and trafficking of children as slaves, especially in areas which bordered the princely states of Rajputana, Malwa and Maharashtra, or the independent kingdom of Nepal, was clearly a serious law and order problem, but the exchange of existing slaves between owners, as well as routes into slavery that provided an escape from extreme poverty or starvation, were more complex issues for the colonial state. Similarly, the existence of slave castes in South India, though seemingly a social ill and a violation of the liberties of the enslaved, could be reimagined in the colonial Indian context as a social safety net for the indigent, involving the slave-holders in obligations that afforded security of subsistence to the poorest sections of the community, stabilised the agricultural system and underpinned the revenues.

As Indrani Chatterjee points out, there has been a tendency by various historians, including Nancy Cassels and Gyan Prakash, to view various interventions, either by individual EIC officials such as Richardson or by the legislative arm of the colonial state (through the various regulations against slave-trading of 1774, 1789 and 1811), as part of a causal chain of events that led to the delegalisation of slavery in India in 1843. Yet, she argues, this chain is itself imaginary. The inconsistency of EIC policy, and the limits it placed

on both its own and metropolitan legislation, suggest that emancipation, or even the protection of slaves, was not a priority in either the short or long terms.[16] As a result, the chapters in this section do not seek to provide a narrative history of events leading to delegalisation in 1843, but rather look at some of the issues and concerns underpinning EIC attitudes to slavery in India between 1808 and 1843, and in particular how specific constructions of Indian slavery came to predominate in the colonial discourse. It will not be possible to consider every specific local context in which individual EIC officials encountered slavery or 'slave like' practices, nor is it the intention of this part, or indeed this book, to attempt to reconstruct the economic functioning or social experiences of slavery from the Indian perspective. Rather, it aims to explore some of the assumptions, expediencies and imperatives that shaped the contours of the colonial discourse on slavery in India, with a view to explaining how these inflected the metropolitan debates discussed in the final part of the book.

The fluidity and diversity over time and space that characterise South Asian slavery make any attempt to categorise or compartmentalise its different regional and historical manifestations extremely difficult. Tanika Sarkar's effort to separate Indian forms of slavery into skilled but unproductive domestic labour in the households of the indigenous elite and productive agrestic slavery that produced a surplus in the form of agricultural crops has been criticised by Indrani Chatterjee for simplifying the wide range of service and labour obligations to both individuals and the state that existed in pre-colonial and colonial India.[17] While fully accepting the validity of this assertion, and being mindful of the difficulty in differentiating categorically between different forms of bondage and enslavement, this part will follow the colonial officials whose ideas it explores by dividing its discussion into three overlapping parts: domestic slavery; slave-trading and the traffic in women and children; and agricultural and caste-based slavery. It is not the intention, in making these divisions, to deny the blurred boundaries that exist within and between such categories, or to ascribe to colonial interpretations of the qualitative differences between them. Domestic slaves often performed limited agricultural labour, while the women of agrestic slave castes might be subject to sexual exploitation. Domestic slavery, while sometimes structured by ideas of kinship and reciprocity, was not necessarily 'benign', while agricultural or caste-based slavery might bleed into and out of debt bondage and other forms of servitude and obligation. The logic of this division is thus based not on an assumption of the inherent differences between domestic and agricultural slavery but on the structure of the colonial discourse that the chapters describe and critique. The three chapters in this part will also follow a slightly arbitrary division between north Indian debates about domestic slavery and slave-trafficking (and the associated debates about immoral commerce,

illegitimate acquisitions and unregulated movement of people within and between colonial and Indian spaces) and South Indian debates about slave castes, agricultural production and emerging plantations economies. In all cases, debates on slavery were less about the conditions of servitude of individual Indians than about the nature of the colonial state's authority and its relationship to indigenous structures and hierarchies of power, metropolitan influence and colonial humanitarianism.

Notes

1 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), p. 298.
2 Ibid., p. 325.
3 Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 183.
4 Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 128.
5 See, for example, Zachary Macaulay, *A Letter to William W. Whitmore … Pointing out Some of the Erroneous Statements Contained in a Pamphlet by Joseph Marryat* (London: L. Relfe, 1823).
6 Cited in Nancy Gardner Cassels, 'Social Legislation under the Company Raj: The Abolition of Slavery Act V 1843', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 11.1 (1988): 69 (emphasis added).
7 Howard Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 170.
8 PP 1828, p. 580.
9 Ibid., p. 55.
10 He then recounted how he had intervened to rescue a slave-girl who had been forcibly taken at Dacca and forced to work as a prostitute before escaping, only to be returned to her former abusers by corrupt local officials who, having stopped her, were willing to take the highest bribe for the girl. Ibid., pp. 49–50.
11 The answer was that the slave-owner's right to the offspring of slaves who were already their property could not be taken from them in the first generation, but that it should not extend any longer than that, and that a proclamation should be issued to that effect. This was a relatively radical decision, as it had been traditional in the region for a state of slavery, once entered into, to be perpetual and hereditary. It does, however, indicate an early concern on the part of the EIC with the conditions of slavery in India, not only as they affected European political relations but also as a local socio-economic issue. Ibid., pp. 4–5.
12 Ibid., p. 4.
13 Ibid., p. 5.
14 Ibid., p. 303.
15 Radhika Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic: Criminal Law and the "Head of the Household", 1772–1843', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 33.3 (1996): 317.
16 Chatterjee, Gender, *Slavery and Law*, p. 183.
17 Ibid., p. 3.

4

'This Household Servitude': Domestic Slavery and Immoral Commerce

In December 1834, in the wake of the previous year's parliamentary debates on the Emancipation Act and the EIC Charter, the Board of Control wrote to Governor-General Lord William Bentinck instructing the Government of India to turn its attention to the question of slavery in their territories. 'This subject in India is one of great delicacy', the Board acknowledged, 'requiring to be treated with the utmost discretion', adding,

> There are certain kinds of restraint required, according to native ideas, for the government of families and forming, according both to law and custom, part of the rights of heads of families, Mussulman and Hindoo, which are not to be included under the title slavery. In legislating, therefore, on slavery, though it may not be easy to define the term precisely, it is necessary that the state to which your measures are meant to apply be described with due care.[1]

Incautious action would be both impolitic and unnecessary, they warned, for the kind slavery that prevailed in India was not like that of the West Indies, being mostly domestic and 'generally mild'. In support of this assertion, the letter outlined what the Board of Control believed to be the normative experience of domestic slaves in India:

> The origin of a great part of it is in seasons of scarcity, when a parent who is unable to maintain his child sells him to some person of ample means. He is then reared as part of the family into which he is received, and feels himself on a level, but little below, and even sometimes above, that of an ordinary servant. To dissolve such a connection by forcible means would in general be to inflict an injury on the emancipated individual. The means of escape, where the colour, features and shape of the slave are not distinguished from those of other classes, and in a country of vast extent, facilitating distant removal, are so easy that the treatment of a slave cannot be worse than that of an ordinary servant, without giving him adequate motive to abscond; and

> the market value is so small that it is seldom worth while to be at the trouble of sending after him.[2]

For the Board of Control, the absence of a racial element to slave oppression, the supposed lack of overt forms of violence and coercion, the comparative vulnerability of 'free' persons to famine and distress and the apparent integration of slaves into the affective networks of the wider kin or clan group created a context in which Indian slavery could be perceived as relatively benign. Indeed, comparisons with African slavery even allowed British observers to question the use of the term 'slavery' when applied to the 'unfreedom' of women and children within the house. As Major R. J. Meade, the Agent to the Governor-General (AGG) for Central India, put it in 1862, 'The term slavery as understood by Europeans, is, as a general rule, hardly applicable to this household servitude.'[3] Such interpretations of benign Indian slavery influenced not only British abolitionists and politicians at the time but also subsequent generations of historians, who have read into them adequate explanations for India's omission from early anti-slavery debates. Yet the image of benign Indian domestic slavery is, of course, a simplified construction, fashioned selectively out of a more diverse and complicated body of colonial 'knowledge' on Indian forms of servitude. This process was not neutral (though it may sometimes have been subconscious) but rather was conditioned by the political and ideological imperatives of both the colonial state and the abolitionist public in Britain.

This chapter seeks to challenge the paradigm of benign Indian domestic bondage that predominated in metropolitan debates about slavery and abolition during the first four decades of the nineteenth century by reading the assumptions upon which it was based critically against the large body of official correspondence that was produced on the subject in the years before 1833. In doing so, the focus will be primarily upon the material contained in the volume of Parliamentary Papers published in 1828. This is not because the official EIC records contained therein are necessarily the most authentic historical sources on Indian slavery but rather because, for all their flaws, they were the most substantial repository of information available to observers in Britain at the time. By using the colonial state's own archive to demonstrate the complex and contested nature of Indian slavery and colonial knowledge about it, it will show that comfortable metropolitan assumptions of mild or benevolent bondage were selectively constructed and did not accurately reflect the reality of Indian forms of servitude and obligation—or the complexity of some colonial officials' interpretations of it. In order to highlight some of the inconsistencies and contradictions between the Board of Control's image of the typical Indian slave and those encountered by colonial officials 'in the field' in India, the chapter will begin by looking in

detail at one specific case involving the abduction and subsequent claims for restoration of a female slave named Jummia, before going on to look in more detail at the issues this case raises when read against the Board of Control's image of the typical domestic slave.

The abduction of Jummia

In 1822, a caravan of dancing women crossed the Yamuna River near 'Kurnoul' (Karnal) on their way attend a wedding ceremony in the territories on the other side. As they passed the village of 'Koonjpoorah' (Kunjpura) on the Karnal to Meerut road, however, they were set upon by a group of armed horsemen, servants of the local ruler, Nawab Bahadur Jung Khan, who forcibly carried off one of the women and took her to their chief. The woman, Jummia, had caught the eye of one of the ruler's advisers, Gholam Mohamed Khan, a man described by the local EIC agent as 'not a Pathan, or a relation to the chief, but a Mussalman of low birth and humble sphere, raised to improper power by the young chief, over whom he exercises unlimited control'. Having had her abducted, he refused to return Jummia to the proprietor of the dancing set, a man named Eddo, who consequently complained repeatedly to the local colonial authorities about her loss. Jummia, he claimed, was both a slave and his property. In order to counteract Eddo's acknowledged proprietary rights over the woman, Gholam Mohamed Khan married her, thus creating an alternative legal claim to her person.[4]

The local British official, Mr Fraser, believed that the actions of the Nawab, his adviser and their men were 'highly improper', and insisted that a case to establish ownership of the woman, and the level of possible compensation due to the dispossessed proprietors of the dancing set, should be heard by the local court. When the Kunjpura regime refused to co-operate, he had seven villages belonging to the chief attached as a punishment. EIC officials at a higher level of the government took a somewhat different view of events, however, for while Governor-General Francis Rawdon-Hastings (Marquess of Hastings, Lord Moira) agreed that the abduction of the woman was an offence that called for serious notice, he reminded Fraser that the Nawab and his subjects were not amenable to the British courts at Delhi, or Karnal, and suggested that the case should have been dealt with indirectly, through the diplomatic offices of the Agent to Governor-General and deputy superintendent. He could not, he said, 'for a moment imagine that the chief of Koonjpoorah, when regularly called upon by yourself, will refuse to make reparations as far as is in his power, for the outrage and violence committed by his followers'. Fraser was instructed to convey to the ruler the Governor-General's strongest sentiments of displeasure at both the offence and the

subsequent failure to co-operate with his attempts to see it legally settled. Meanwhile, the deputy superintendent was instructed to investigate the affair to 'ascertain the amount of the damages due to the owners of the set, should it appear (of which indeed there cannot be any doubt) that a *bona fide* marriage has taken place', and to adjudge what penalty would be adequate for the offence of forcibly seizing the woman. 'An attempt on the part of the Nawab to screen his adherents, and thereby obstruct the course of justice,' the Governor-General warned, 'will expose him to the suspicion of having countenanced their illegal violence' and thus leave him liable to the imposition of a suitable fine, but once the affair was satisfactorily settled the attached villages were to be restored to him.[5]

The case of Jummia, though unusual in some respects, offers us insights into various issues that faced the colonial state when dealing with slavery in India, many of which were not raised by the Board of Control's archetypal image of the domestic slave. We do not know, for example, how Jummia came to be a slave in a dancing set. It may be that her enslavement was the result of the kind of distress sale due to famine described by the Board of Control; as Veena Oldenburg has discussed, such sales supplied the *kothas* (matriarchal establishments of courtesans) of Lucknow well into the twentieth century.[6] Yet, even if this were the case, her subsequent profession raised ethical issues for colonial officials, who, while willing to accept distress sales in general, were more likely to question the morality of selling young girls into prostitution. 'I need not explain to you what the state of a woman, brought up from childhood by men who live upon her earnings as a professional dancer and singer, is', Fraser remarked.[7] Of course, Oldenburg has argued that the lifestyle of a high-class courtesan can be read as one of resistance to patriarchal norms rather than of exploitation, although it is not clear that Jummia had sufficient status to benefit from the autonomy and independent wealth that such a lifestyle could bring. The dancing troupe of which she was a member was patronised by a local ruling elite, but she herself was designated a slave and was subject to a male 'master'; in the life of high-status courtesans studied by Oldenburg, 'pimps or other male agents simply did not exist'.[8] Moreover, her route into slavery may not have been consensual. Although some dancing sets and brothels may have been supplied by women and girls voluntarily escaping intolerable lives as wives and widows in the 'respectable' world,[9] it was widely acknowledged by colonial officials in different parts of India that children sold as domestic slaves, *nautch* girls or prostitutes, especially to less prestigious establishments, were sometimes abducted, or otherwise coerced, and were moved through disruptive, destabilising and illegal internal trades. Sumanta Banerjee refers to the informal machinations of the *kutni* (female pimp, or go-between), who would lure girls into inadvisable liaisons, and thence into prostitution.

He notes that by the mid nineteenth century, in Calcutta at least, this role had been usurped by male pimps in red light areas.[10]

It is also not clear from the colonial record exactly what the relationship between Jummia, the proprietors of the dancing set and the Kunjpura royal family and its acolytes was prior to her abduction. As Chatterjee details, skilled and unskilled slave performers and their owners could exist in complex relationships of service with local notables, reliant on the exchange of monetary payments and gifts. This could involve a range of ways of accessing the slave's services, including purchase, hire, lease or mortgage. Slaves might even be temporarily 'married' to their patrons, thus providing their wealthy paramours with short- or long-term tenures over their persons in return for stipends or payments in cash or kind.[11] Veena Oldenburg notes how Wajid Ali Shah, the last Shi'i nawab, or king of Awadh, had used a Shi'i variant of Islamic marriage called *mutah*, which allowed a man to enter multiple marital contracts that expired when the stipulated time elapsed. This allowed men to patronise courtesans and dancing women without the accusation of adultery, but was clearly open to misinterpretation by the colonial state.[12] Whether the marriage of Jummia and Gholam Mohamed Khan was *mutah*, or the bona fide one the Governor-General assumed, is not known. The colonial records are not clear about any pre-existing arrangements or relationships between Jummia and Gholum Mohamed Khan. Instead they simplify the case into one of legal ownership, with the rights implied by property in the slave being juxtaposed against the 'ownership' implied by marriage.

By whatever means she had come into his possession, Eddo clearly had some proof of his ownership of Jummia, for neither Fraser nor any other colonial official questioned his right to the person of the abducted slave. As Chatterjee points out, commitment to the property rights of the Indian slave-holder was one of the key structuring imperatives that informed EIC policies around slavery. Indeed, far from allowing discontented slaves to protest at their mistreatment by escaping, as the Board of Control implied they might easily do, the colonial state usually upheld the slave-owner's right to property, even to the extent of returning fugitive slaves to their owners.[13] It is clear that this would have been the outcome in this case, had not other considerations been brought into play. As the deputy superintendent put it, 'the claimant is a British subject, the defendant an independent chieftain; the first has lost his property, the latter unlawfully retains it.'[14] Ultimately, however, the marriage between Jummia and Gholam Mohomed Khan placed another set of legal imperatives in opposition to those implied by Eddo's right to his property, for, as Fraser remarked, 'according to the Mohammedan law, which in several instances has been enforced by the Nizamat Adawlat, a nautch girl is at liberty to forsake that course of life, and unite herself in marriage to one of

the faithful, and such an act is by the Mohammedan law officers considered laudable.'[15] On this occasion, then, return of the slave was not deemed to be legally enforceable, whatever the local colonial officials might think about the manner of her abduction. Instead, damages were to be levied to cover the cost of Jummia's ornaments and the loss of her services, amounting to 1,050 rupees. This was to be held on deposit until Eddo, who initially refused to take it, could be persuaded to accept that 'according to Mohameddan law, by which he is bound to abide, a legal marriage sets aside his claim to the restoration of the girl'.[16] That the marriage and her subsequent incorporation into the 'respectable' domestic arena of Gholam Mohamed Khan's home was a positive outcome for Jummia was never questioned. To the limited extent that her feelings on the matter were discussed at all, it was simply to state that she 'was at first averse to remaining with the person who had caused her to be carried off, but the marriage ceremony very naturally made her content'.[17] Her new position, however, created a barrier between her and the legal processes of the colonial state. Lamenting his inability to persuade the chief to allow Jummia to appear before the court, Fraser noted that he had been unsuccessful even though 'it was explained … that when she was called upon to give her reply, she might do so through another person, although her presence was necessary, and that … as to the inviolability of her veil, that on that score, herself or her nominal husband need be under no apprehension."[18] The inability, or unwillingness, of the colonial state to penetrate the domestic realm raises questions about how it functioned as a space of enslavement, for while incorporation into the family was seen as a benefit for Jummia, as for the supposedly archetypal male domestic slave described by the Board of Control, for many female slaves the *zenana*, or harem, could be a place of incarceration—a site which the colonial state, ever wary of violating the sanctity of the Indian home, could not reach, and the slave could not leave.

The case above highlights various issues facing EIC officials dealing with slavery in India that are not apparent from the sanitised Board of Control depiction of benign domestic servitude. In this case, as in others, the debate revolved not around the rights and wrongs of slave status in principle, but on the competing political and legal imperatives of protagonists who fell under different jurisdictions and occupied different spaces and spheres of authority. The case of Jummia inverted the usual pattern, in that the woman had been 'taken away by force by armed men' and carried over territorial boundaries in order to abduct her *out* of slavery. Yet this action, and its inverse, the violent and coercive acquisition and movement of slaves for sale, raised important issues about local stability and lawlessness, the obedience or disobedience of local chiefs and the limits of the moral and political jurisdiction of the colonial state. Complaining that the chief had evaded requests that the woman be sent to court, Fraser noted that 'his replies are like all natives,

humble and promising, but the knowledge that no fixed political power yet stands at Delhi, induces him to go on with procrastination. Such a state of disobedience to local authority is detrimental to the public security."[19] Intervention in this case, as with others of slave-trafficking over the porous boundaries between British and 'Indian' India, was bound up with wider concerns about law and order and the maintenance of colonial authority, as well as with the legal and ethical issues of slave-ownership. Thus this case, and others like it, provides an apposite example of what Singha describes as 'the range of pressures under which the Company formulated this distinction between matters of "personal" right, to be dealt with in civil courts through the "religious" law of the parties concerned, and matters of "public interest" placed in the realm of magisterial authority."[20]

The above-mentioned themes were important issues for the colonial state that linked debates on slavery and the specific images of Indian bondage that informed them to the wider imperatives of colonial rule and imperial identity. Although less well known than colonial engagements with controversial social customs like *sati* and infanticide, the nineteenth-century British encounter with slavery and slave-trading in India represents an important point of intersection between the expanding political and 'moral' authority of the colonial state, metropolitan policies and debates and the internal sovereignty of the Indian kingdom and of the Indian home. British reactions to domestic slavery reflected a specific set of assumptions about Indian identity, family and gender relations, while their attempts to limit slave-trading reveal the conflicting nature of the ideological, moral, political and pragmatic imperatives that underpinned imperial policy formation. British debates about slave-trading saw anti-slavery sentiment and concern with the stability and integrity of their borders juxtaposed against a political discourse about the limits of acceptable British intervention in both the private domain of their subjects' households and the political domain of the semi-independent states that bordered their territories. In the process, the EIC distinguished, as Singha puts it, 'between law which had a territorial scope and dealt with the "public" world and "personal" law, equated with Hindu and Muslim religious laws, which ruled over family relationships, family property and religious life'.[21] In applying these distinctions to the question of slavery in India, EIC officials were able to construct a number of artificial boundaries: between their territories and the princely states, between domestic slavery in the home and the traffic in women and children that supplied it, and between coercive acquisitions of slaves and that by sale of self or family members during times of hardship. Yet slave status in India was more fluid, and routes into and out of slavery more ambiguous, than such dichotomies between the home and the world, the domestic and the foreign, allow. Slavery itself was considered to be a 'private' matter relating to the domestic economy of the Indian

household, while slave-trading could be a potentially dangerous, destabilising and disruptive issue of law and order for the colonial state. As a result, the slavery question represented a point where British ideas about the sanctity of a 'static' Indian domestic space, epitomised by the *zenana*, intersected with pragmatic concerns about the unregulated and lawless movement of people through the porous boundaries between British and 'Indian' India. British engagements with issues of slavery and slave-trading cut across the normal boundaries between the private sphere and the jurisdiction of the colonial state, as well as across territorial borders. Consequently, British attempts to prevent slave-trading, both within their own territories and between these and the princely states, operated in an unstable ideological and political terrain, leading to inconsistency and ultimately failure in their efforts to eradicate the problem.

The anomalies between the image of Indian slavery put forward by the Board of Control and those emerging out of the case of Jummia's abduction raise a number of interlocking and sometimes conflicting issues, the discussion of which will structure the remainder of this chapter. The first is the way in which the EIC constructed and applied assumptions about the rights of Indian heads of households over their property and their patriarchal authority over all the members of their domestic establishments. The assumption that certain forms of slavery were sanctioned by Hindu and Muslim laws was central to the formation of colonial policy in this respect, although, as we will see, these supposed legal precedents were not always applied as uniformly as was sometimes suggested by the EIC. Although the right to property was indeed a central concern of EIC policy on slavery and slave-trading in India, this chapter will argue that this was intersected by a number of other issues and concerns, which juxtaposed humanitarian anti-slavery impulses with the pragmatic local imperatives of colonial stability. This led to the uneven implementation of policy on slavery and slave-trading across the EIC's territories as well as the construction of specific interpretations and images of Indian slavery to fit with the imperatives of specific local debates.

Legal precedents: Hindu and Muslim laws on slavery

EIC territorial and political expansion in the latter half of the eighteenth century generated the unprecedented problem of how to create a functioning colonial state that conformed to the fundamental principles and expectations of Georgian political economy, while at the same time adapting to the specific contingencies of the country and the imperatives of stable and profitable imperial rule. Unlike British colonies in the Caribbean and North

America, where British civil, criminal and judicial institutions were exported largely verbatim to a white settler society that marginalised, suppressed or exterminated local inhabitants, India's large population, ancient civilisation and established forms of local self-governance meant that existing state institutions and functions had to be taken into account when implementing colonial systems and strategies of rule.[22] As Warren Hastings famously put it in 1772, the EIC had to 'adapt our Regulations to the Manners and Understandings of the People, and the Exigencies of the country, adhering as closely as we are able to their ancient uses and Institutions'. From the outset, the EIC balanced pressures from parliament (which periodically reviewed the adequacy of EIC rule and extended its authority over EIC activities with each successive charter renewal) with the pragmatic and, for some, ideological commitment of ruling through or adapting existing Indian institutions, and maintaining the authority of Hindu and Muslim religious law. As a result, the formation of EIC policy in India represented a complex mix of British and Indian structures and principles, which had to balance the existing customs of the local populace, the expectations of the home authorities and its own assessments of the expediencies of its rule. These tensions, and the competing concerns that fostered them, are clearly visible in the debate on slavery and its suppression in India in the early nineteenth century, as anti-slavery sentiment on the part of individual EIC officials and increasing abolitionist pressure from the home authorities intersected with EIC assessments of the 'traditional' legitimacy and 'peculiar' functioning of slavery in Indian society and the practical difficulties involved in interfering with it.

EIC policy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was to uphold Hindu and Muslim religious laws and utilise them in the adjudication of social and domestic issues. As Cornwallis declared in 1793, 'the regulations which may be adopted for the internal government of the country will be calculated to preserve to the natives the laws of the Shaster and the Koran … (and to) … protect them in the free exercise of their religion'. This official commitment to respect indigenous law and custom was further formalised in 1795 by an Act of Parliament (35 Geo. 3 c. 155) that guaranteed that the EIC government would observe and protect the 'Mahomedan laws with respect to Mahomedans and the Hindoo laws with regard to Hindoos'.[23] Thus, in keeping with their usual strategies for understanding and codifying Indian society, EIC officials encountering slavery in India initially looked to textual authorities for information regarding conditions of servitude, as set down in the Koran and the main Hindu law books, the *dharmasastras* or *smritis* of Manu and Narada, to inform their policy. Initially, the accepted position on Hindu slavery was that laid out by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed in his *Code of Gentoo Laws*, a translation of the

ordinances of Hindu law compiled with the assistance of Brahmin pandits in 1776.[24] Patronised by Hastings himself, this digest was designed to codify the diverse and sometimes contradictory range of legal and religious pronouncements that EIC judges received from their Brahmin advisers. In it, Halhed enumerated a range of different forms of servitude and obligation, including fifteen conditions under which Hindus could lawfully be enslaved. He also listed a range of circumstances in which slaves of various sorts could buy or receive their freedom, and regulations relating to who could legitimately be enslaved and how different types of slaves should be treated. Halhed's work was later superseded as the authoritative European text on Hindu law by William Jones's *Institutes of Hindoo Law*. This was based on the *Code of Manu*, which was widely seen by British orientalists in the late eighteenth century as the archetypal Hindu scriptural authority. Following Manu, Jones noted that 'There are servants of seven sorts: one made captive under a standard, or in battle, one maintained in consideration of service, one born of a female slave in the house, one sold, or given, or inherited from ancestors, and one enslaved by way of punishment on his inability to pay a large fine', although most colonial observers who commented on the subject continued to refer to the fifteen divisions enumerated by Halhed.[25]

EIC interpretations of the Islamic position on slavery was taken from Charles Hamilton's translation of the *Hedaya* or *Guide to Arabic Books of Law*, which in volume 3, 'The Book of Sales', clearly outlined the rules governing the sale of slaves and, by maintaining that the murder of a slave by his master was not punishable by law, indicated the apparently unlimited authority of a master over his slave.[26] Yet, as Chatterjee points out, it was 'almost completely silent on the question of who was and who was not a slave'.[27] Possible legitimate routes into slavery were more restricted in the Islamic context, as the Muslim legal code only recognised the enslavement of infidels captured in holy struggle (*jihad*) against the 'Abode of War' (*dar al-Harb*). This placed strict limitations on forcible enslavement by Muslims of formerly free individuals, although slaves could also be acquired as tribute (*bakt*) from vassal states beyond the Islamic frontiers, through reproduction among existing slaves, or through purchase from slave-merchants known as 'importers' or 'cattle-dealers'.[28] The ideal prescriptions held in the Islamic scriptures did not always reflect the reality of slavery on the ground, however, and, as Richardson and other colonial officials pointed out, if the letter of the law were applied many forms of indigenous slavery in India would be proved illegal.

Taken together, these interpretations of Hindu and Muslim laws provided the foundations for an EIC position on slavery that saw it as a legitimate social practice, which, however unpalatable in principle, was protected from authoritative colonial intervention by their commitment both to respect local religious law and to provide their Indian subjects with 'security to

their persons and property'.[29] Even the reforming Cornwallis noted that 'there are many obstacles in the way against abolishing slavery entirely in the Company's dominions, as the number of slaves is considerable, and the practice sanctioned by both Mahomedan and Hindoo laws'.[30] That the EIC intended to follow Hindu and Muslim laws in their adjudication of slavery cases was confirmed in 1793, when, in reply to a letter by Chittagong judge J. Stonehouse asking how he should act in cases for the restitution of fugitive slaves, the Nizamat Adalat declared that

> the spirit of section 15, regulation 4, 1793 (which directed that 'in suits regarding the succession, inheritance, marriage and caste, and all religious usages and institutions, the Mahomedan laws with respect to Mahomedans, and the Hindu law with regard to Hindoos, are to be considered as the general rules by which the judges are to form their decisions') should be applied to the cases of slavery.[31]

This opinion was further reinforced by a ruling, endorsed by the Governor-General in Council in 1798, that insofar as rights of property in slaves were recognised by Hindu and Muslim laws, they were valid in the Company's civil courts.[32] In theory, therefore, to the extent that Indian slaves could be proved to be the legitimate property of their masters, the colonial state was bound to uphold claims of ownership. Chatterjee argues that this protection of proprietary rights, rather than any effort to ameliorate the state of slavery, was the basis of most EIC policy on the subject before 1843.[33]

Although respect for the sanctity of Hindu and Muslim laws was presented as the cornerstone of EIC policy on slavery in India, and was invoked as a rationale for not fully implementing inconvenient legislation from Britain, its actual application was uneven and its construction problematic. The codification of Hindu and Muslim religious texts that formed the basis of colonial jurisprudence was not an ideologically or politically neutral process, but rather represented a subjective 'textualisation of tradition' that privileged certain sources and interpretations of religious authority over others, and elevated elite authored scriptures over the 'little traditions' of local religious practice. Moreover, the colonial state's implementation of these principles was far from absolute, for although the EIC liked to portray its commitment to religious neutrality as a fundamental principle of its rule, and used it as an ideological justification for refusing to intervene in a range of problematic issues, including slavery, it was not consistent in its application of these ideals. Indeed, as Singha points out, the EIC was from the outset willing to overlook, or overrule, various religious injunctions that proved inconvenient for the maintenance of effective political and judicial control.[34] Moreover, as Lata Mani has shown in the context of *sati*, the

EIC could be selective when it came to applying interpretations of the law that fitted its own imperatives or interests.[35] Thus, although, as Richardson pointed out in 1808, the Islamic injunction that only infidel prisoners of war could legitimately be enslaved provided a context in which the EIC could have declared the vast majority of slaves in Muslim households free, and the ban on enslaving women for immoral purposes such as prostitution would have allowed the emancipation of Muslim women enslaved to brothels and dancing sets, the EIC did not choose to follow these religious injunctions to their logical legislative conclusion.[36] When one EIC official in South India suggested that slavery there should be subjected entirely to the rule of Islamic law, as this 'if carried completely into effect' would not only mitigate its severity and 'render the slaves in Malabar a very different range of mortals' but also effectively end the purchase of slaves for sale by Muslim 'Moplah' (*mapilla*) merchants, this was not adopted.[37] Instead, as Radhika Singha points out, British magistrates 'assumed an authority not permitted in Islamic law—that of emancipating the slave in individual cases of cruelty'.[38]

Despite the emphasis placed on codified religious law, when it fitted their needs the EIC was willing to base policy on local usage, or political convenience, rather than scriptural authority. Although respect for Hindu and Muslim laws was put forward as an insurmountable obstacle to the abolition of slavery in India, the selective application of scriptural authority suggests that it was not the impermeable barrier to reform that EIC authorities liked to maintain. Rather, it provided a justifiable pretext for selective inaction that was based on more pragmatic imperatives of colonial rule—in particular, the instability that was apprehended from any attempt to interfere with the domestic authority of the Indian patriarch within his own home and the sovereign authority of the Indian ruler within as yet independent territories. Indeed, the need to reconcile their commitment to Hindu and Muslim laws with the injunctions laid down in the metropolitan Slave Trade Felony Act of 1811 (of which more in the next chapter) allowed the EIC to make some useful distinctions: domestic slavery as a static institution could be defended on the grounds of its legal sanction under Hindu and Muslim laws, thus allowing the EIC to avoid alienating local Indian elites on whom they relied, while apparently coercive trades could be suppressed under the auspices of 1811, allowing the EIC to control its borders and regulate the movement of their population. In order to reconcile these distinctions with the overriding colonial discourse of freedom, however, they had also to reinforce certain discursive formations about the nature of Indian slavery that helped justify non-intervention in it.

'This household servitude': imagining domestic slavery

If its supposed respect for Hindu and Muslim laws provided one context in which the EIC could rationalise its unwillingness to intervene to suppress slavery in India, the slave's location within the household provided another. By emphasising that domestic slavery was a 'family' issue that fell, with certain limitations, under the prerogative of the Indian patriarch, British magistrates could avoid being 'precipitated into the dangerous terrain of domestic regulation, where once the "head of the household" had maintained a proper hierarchy of subordination.'[39] Thus, although, as numerous scholars have noted, the nineteenth century saw increasing interventions in the Indian socio-religious realm, from the prohibition of *sati* in 1829, the legalisation of widow remarriage in 1856, to the age of consent and age of marriage legislation of 1891 and 1929, in the period in question the colonial state remained extremely wary of violating the authority, or the privacy, of the Indian home. In order to reconcile this with their professed opposition to slavery, however, the qualitative differences between domestic and other forms of bondage had to be maintained.

By emphasising that most Indian slavery was part of the domestic economy rather than the capitalist economy, colonial officials could dissociate this form of bondage from the industrial plantation slavery of the New World and present it as 'a mild servitude, characterised by affective relations and life-long attachments'.[40] As early as 1798, Revd William Tennant could comment on the blurring of the boundaries between slavery, servitude and kinship, noting,

> Servant and slave approach in many instances so near to each other in condition that the lines of discrimination are not always discernible. Even a son is in many respects under the power of his father and, after the legal age, if he remain under the same roof, he foregoes the advantage of earning for himself.[41]

The slaves held by wealthy Hindu and Muslim families across India, it was argued, were primarily indicators of prestige, who were used only for household and limited agricultural labour. As a result, their condition compared favourably not only with that of African slaves in the West Indies but also with that of agricultural slaves within India itself. As Mr Graeme, the Collector at Malabar, put it in his report on slavery in his district in 1822, domestic slaves belonging to the wealthy Muslim elite 'live in the houses of their masters, and partake of all the privileges of their religion. This kind of slavery is a social fraternity, and is a step to the best comforts, and the highest honours of life among Mussulmans. It is totally dissimilar, in every essential point, to the servitude of the *chermar* [low-caste agricultural

slave].'[42] Similarly, James Forbes noted that slaves in Muslim homes in India were usually well treated, commenting, 'I have witnessed the cruel treatment of the Portuguese slaves in the plantations of South America, and conversed with the slaves who filled a high station in India: the latter no doubt have more reason to be satisfied.'[43] The same, it was argued, was true of elite Hindu homes, and as late as 1862, Major General George Lawrence, AGG for Rajputana, could reiterate the increasingly standardised British interpretation of benign, familial domestic slavery:

> the practice of keeping these household slaves exists throughout Rajputana and there is no attempt to conceal the fact on the part of the princes or the upper classes who can afford to keep dependents of this description, who are treated as members of the family and protégés of their masters rather than slaves in our description of the term … They are employed in various ways; as confidential servants, as household attendants, and for the indoor and outdoor work generally, much in the same way as free servants, except that the former for the most part receive greater consideration and are considered to have larger claims on the favour and protection of their masters. … these slaves very rarely abscond from their masters, except when guilty of theft and in the case of women when seduced away, but on the contrary that they lead a very comfortable life and are attached to their masters, whose houses they regard as their homes.[44]

Of course, the central paradox of the dominant colonial discourse of Indian domestic slavery was that the rationale for British non-interference relied simultaneously on locating slavery within a private, secluded Indian domestic space that they were unable to penetrate, and on an assumed knowledge about the benign way in which slavery functioned within that unseen space. Some colonial officials acknowledged this contradiction, admitting that they had little idea how slavery functioned behind the impenetrable walls of the *zenana*. As Thomas Baber put it,

> The treatment of slaves, whether domestic or agrestic, necessarily depends upon the individual character of their masters. Of the domestic slaves, especially the most numerous part of them, the females, it would be difficult to say what the treatment is, or how employed, clothed, or subsisted, among a people like the natives of India, who, whether Hindus or Mahomedans, observe such watchful jealousy in all that regards their domestic economy, and, consequently of whose family arrangements and habits, and indeed domestic character in general, we can know so very little.[45]

Even the Madras Board of Revenue admitted that while male domestic slaves, who were usually employed as menials, were usually well treated, 'none, except those who have access to the recesses of the harem, can judge

of the treatment the females receive'.[46] Thus, while incorporation into the family and the home was usually presented as one of the positive aspects of domestic slavery, the very seclusion of the women's quarters, which domestic slaves were needed to maintain, could turn them into places of incarceration. Francis Buchanan, for example, noted that the women's apartments at Seringapatam

> remained perfectly inviolate under the usual guard of eunuchs, and contains about six hundred women, belonging to the Sultan, and to his late-father. A great part of these are slaves, or attendants on the ladies; but they are kept in equally strict confinement with their mistresses … They have been all shut up in the Zenana when very young; and … I have sufficient reason to think that none of them are desirous of leaving their confinement; being wholly ignorant of any other manner of living, and having no acquaintance whatever beyond the walls of their prison.[47]

Even illegitimately acquired children could not be recovered by the state once they had been 'immured in the zenana of a courtier or respectable person' because British officials were too wary of implications of violating this domestic space, even in cases of kidnap.[48] In 1832, for example, Mr Cavendish, Resident at Gwalior, referred to the 'total impossibility of ever recovering children from the female apartments where they are concealed, or rather buried for a time, and no man can enter'.[49]

While most observers in Britain were willing to accept and reproduce the convenient trope of mild domestic slavery, not all colonial officials believed that it was entirely or invariably benign. Thomas Brooke, the political agent at Bareilly, writing in 1811, noted that while some male domestics 'obtain comfortable establishments in the families by whom they were bought as slaves … the greater number [lead] a laborious life for bare subsistence and are often hardly treated.'[50] A. D. Campbell, acting superintendent of police for Madras, reported having receive complaints against the Karnataka Nawab, Azim Al-Daula, which 'left on my mind a strong impression of the cruelty and wanton barbarity with which … female slaves were subject to be treated', adding that 'The seclusion of female slaves … too often precludes complaint, prevents redress, and cloaks crimes at which Europeans would shudder.'[51] That these interpretations of slave hardship were accurate in at least some cases is backed up by cases of slave mistreatment that came before the colonial courts. As described in the introduction to Part I, 'a married woman of respectability' was fined 200 rupees in 1813 for 'beating and burning [the] privy parts and other parts' of her eleven-year-old slave-girl.[52] This was not an isolated incident. In 1805, another mistress was fined for pouring hot oil on the genitals of her eight-year-old slave-girl, after the child

was raped by a tailor.[53] In a similar vein, Sylvia Vatuk provides a detailed and illuminating account of the case of Bharatee, a slave-woman who was beaten to death by her noble Muslim mistress for absconding from her service.[54] The intention here is not to replace the stereotypical British image of benign domestic slavery with an equally one-dimensional catalogue of cruelty but rather to indicate that colonial officials at the time were aware that not all domestic slaves were well treated. Statements like that of Lord Ellenborough, made in the House of Lords during the Charter Bill debate, that he had never known of an instance of an Indian domestic slave being mistreated, were hardly supported by the evidence available within the published Parliamentary Papers, let alone that which could be found in the records of the colonial courts. Nor could all colonial officials reconcile the toleration of even relatively mild slavery with British identity. Thomas Baber, for example, whose anti-slavery endeavours in South India are discussed in more detail later, believed that

> there is no reason to suppose that their condition is particularly grievous, though it must be obvious that, under the most favourable circumstances, a state of perpetual servitude, whether employed as menials, and kept for the purpose of saving the greater expense of free labour, or, what is almost universal with female domestic slaves, for sensual gratifications, must, at best, be but a life of pain and sorrow; and, as such, as repugnant to humanity and morality, as it is to the principles of British rule.[55]

Ironically, although colonial discourse on Indian slavery popularised the idea that domestic slavery was relatively benign, the one way in which the EIC did seek to interfere with it before 1833 was to limit the penal power of slave-holders. In 1802, in Madras, for example, it was made a criminal offence for a master deliberately to take the life of his slave. Radhika Singha argues that EIC interventions to 'domesticate' patriarchal authority reflected the desire of the colonial state to limit what it deemed 'excessive' manifestations of patriarchal prerogative that 'clashed with the ideological, fiscal and pacificatory imperatives of the colonial state'.[56] Significantly, by intervening to limit the levels of chastisement a master could inflict on a slave, they were both undermining their own arguments for non-intervention by admitting the dark underside of domestic slavery in India and violating their policy of respecting Hindu and Muslim laws by claiming a power not authorised by Islamic law. Singha notes the ambiguity of this position, remarking,

> It is ironical that the regulations which made the master criminally responsible for inflicting death or serious injury on a slave could be frequently invoked as an argument against abolishing slavery in India. The reasoning was that Indian slavery, a 'mild domestic servitude', was becoming even

> milder under Company rule because the master was aware that any act of cruelty would be punished by the British magistrate. The priority for the state was to establish its right to punish injury to person, not to ensure the subject's freedom from personal restraint. This option had the advantage of maintaining magisterial authority in the matter of injury to person, while preserving slavery as a civil status.[57]

That many magistrates and judges had a 'tacit understanding' that the head of the household had a certain right to the 'moderate chastisement' of women, children, servants and slaves is of course not surprising given that these rights over the members of his household were a staple part of the Georgian domestic economy as well; but the colonial state's intervention to restrict it is indicative of its broader desire to reserve to itself the 'privilege of taking life'.[58]

If British officials usually viewed Indian domestic slavery as relatively mild, they also saw it as a gendered institution. In 1816, the magistrate from Tipperah (Tripura—Dacca division) reported that although slaves were occasionally inveigled away most of these were 'females, who, being more employed for domestic purposes that those of the other sex, are in greater demand.'[59] Similarly, in 1821, Sir John Malcolm reported that 'Slavery in Malwa is chiefly limited to females, but there is perhaps no province in India where there are so many slaves of this sex … female children and grown up women are bought by all ranks.'[60] In fact, domestic slaves could be male or female, depending on their function within the household, although pre-colonial vernacular sources do indicate that women and children predominated.[61] In polygamous Rajput society, for example, the holding of female retainers, or *davris*, was common and was crucial to the functioning of the *zenana*.[62] Female domestic slaves often formed part of a bride's dowry, providing her with a reliable and reassuringly familiar retinue on arrival in her husband's home. These women, together with the household's existing female slaves, carried out a range of ritual and domestic functions, acting as conduits between the inmates of the *zenana* and the outside world. The precise status of these women, and of other female domestics, is complex and varied according to their social and sexual status within the *zenana*. Some could rise to positions of considerable power as *paswans* (concubines), while others remained mired in domestic drudgery.[63]

For many colonial officials, the blurring of boundaries between productive and reproductive labour for female domestic slaves created tensions within the narrative of benign domestic slavery. As Singha notes, the relationship of subordination between slave-women and their masters was a particularly delicate issue because it overlapped with the institutions of concubinage and polygamous marriage.[64] On the one hand, the need for 'respectable' Indian

homes to have female attendants to protect the honour and modesty of the family's women reinforced the idea of integration into the domestic heart of the family; on the other, it opened up the possibility of sexual immorality and exploitation within the home. Richardson, in his 1808 letter, emphasised this negative aspect of domestic servitude, noting that

> [if] anything can add to the horror which the idea of slavery raises in every human breast, it is the reflection that by the Mussulman law respecting female slaves, the master is not only legal lord of their persons for purposes of laborious services, but also for those of sensual gratification; even such as his perverted or unnatural passions may impel his brutality to indulge. The enormity of this diabolical law is shocking to humanity, and the horrors of such a wretch's situation are not calmly to be thought of. The haughty Islamite deigns not even to persuade, and is not only authorised to set every tender and delicate sensation at naught, but may legally outrage the very laws of nature.[65]

The dichotomy between Victorian values of monogamous, companionate marriage and their perception of the polygamous *zenana*, or harem—that morally ambiguous space in which the sexual 'otherness' of 'the Orient' was played out in the British imagination—inserted a degree of moral ambivalence, as the supposedly benign nature of domestic slavery was juxtaposed with the evils of sexual exploitation and moral degradation.[66]

Concerns over the morality of slaves' reproductive labour were even more pronounced when prostitution was involved, for although authors such as Nancy Cassels have separated issues of sex work from their discussion of slavery, colonial accounts suggest that British observers did not clearly delineate between prostitution, domestic slavery and other forms of exploitation.[67] Sir John Malcolm, for example, noted that female slaves in Malwa were

> in almost every instance sold into prostitution; some it is true rise to be favoured mistresses of their master and enjoy both power and luxury, while others are raised by the successes in life of their sons, but these are exceptions. The dancing girls, who are all slaves, are condemned to a life of toil and vice, for the profit of others, and some of the first Rajpoot chiefs and zamindars in Malwa, who have from 50 to 200 female slaves in their family, after employing them in all the menial labours of their house during the day, send them at night to their own dwellings, where they are at liberty to form such connections as they please, but a large share of the profits of that promiscuous intercourse into which they fall is annually exacted by their masters, who adds any children they happen to produce to his list of slaves.[68]

Similarly, Charles Metcalfe commented of the area near Delhi, 'the natives

of this country are undeniably greatly addicted to the purchase of slaves, especially of the female sex; some because slaves are kept at less expense than other servants, others for the sake of the privacy of the apartments of their wives, others for the gratification of their own vicious propensities and others for the purpose of public prostitution.'[69]

Sexual exploitation destabilised British ideas about benign domestic slavery and created a context for more negative interpretations of the trade. As Radhika Singha points out, the sale of women into prostitution 'carried the whiff of an immoral commerce and could not easily be assimilated to the domestic realm of marriage and reproduction'.[70] Richardson, writing in 1808, invoked emerging Victorian sexual morality and growing colonial concern with the dangers of unregulated sex work, noting,

> It is not less shocking to reflect that women, who have spent their youth and worn out their persons in the grossest debauchery and prostitution, when their faded beauty no longer produces their wonted luxuries, and even their former paramours in guilt and vice turn from them with satiety and disgust, purchase female children for the avowed purpose of the most licentious life. These females, were such injurious practices prevented by the abolition of all slavery, would become useful members of the community, and add to the prosperity of the state by the increase of their species. They would marry industrious labourers and mechanics, and numbers would escape being exposed to the venal and promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, which is highly prejudicial to the population.[71]

Of course, as the growing body of literature on prostitution in colonial India reveals, 'traditional' forms of sex work, including that of skilled 'slave performers' such as *nautch* girls, did not conform to Victorian ideas of the 'common prostitute', a term not used in India until 1838.[72] They could incorporate a range of statuses and significant alternative lifestyles for the women involved, whose relationships to both their 'owners' and their patrons could be far more complex than the simple dichotomy of slave and master.[73] Increasingly negative colonial interpretations of the trade in women and children coincided with early attempts to control sex work. A police regulation issued in Bombay in 1812, for example, labelled brothels, along with opium dens and gambling houses, as potential disturbers of public peace, which were to be issued with licences. As Ashwini Tambe points out, prostitution was not illegal, as long as it was orderly, which the 'carrying away' of women was not. In 1827, the enticing of women into immoral commerce was outlawed, a move which Tambe sees as aimed at re-enshrining patriarchal authority over their wives and daughters, rather than necessarily limiting the supply of girls to brothels and dancing sets.[74]

The boundaries between the sex trade and the slave trade were not

distinct in early nineteenth-century India, and colonial discussions of each bled into each other. In 1825, for example, J. Monro, the Collector at Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli), brought the 'sale and purchase of female children by dancing women, for the avowed purpose of bringing them up in a life of immorality' to the attention of the provincial Court of Circuit. 'The custom is so notorious', he argued, 'and its abominable tendency so evident, that no comment can be necessary; but I am apprehensive, that unless it be specifically excepted from those purchases of children which are now (under some circumstances) legal, an opinion may be entertained, that such dealings are countenanced by law.' Monro believed that a prohibition of such transactions would not infringe any acknowledged rights, would act as a check upon child-stealing and would have a 'beneficial tendency to promote morality'. The EIC authorities interpreted the issue differently, however; the Court of Circuit advised him that no enactment against the practice was necessary, while the Governor in Council added that as the institution of dancing women was closely connected with the religious and civil ceremonies and observances of the great bulk of the people, any interference would have to be 'conducted with the greatest caution'. He noted the 'difficulty and delicacy' of interfering with slavery in India generally, and, tellingly, added:

> the subject now under consideration is of no less delicacy, and it seems to afford less inducement to interfere; for it is to be considered, that loss of personal freedom is not among the consequences of being brought up to be a dancing woman, and the species of immorality which the interference would propose to redress, prevails, and is generally tolerated, in the most enlightened and most highly civilised nations of Europe, and it is much more closely connected with general depravity, and with misery in England, than it is in India.[75]

Several other EIC officials also questioned the morality of allowing young girls to become the slaves of pimps, dancing sets and brothel owners and questioned whether legislation against the trafficking of slaves across territorial boundaries should not be applied to these often itinerant communities, with similarly inconclusive results. In 1832, for example, Mr Cavendish, Resident at Gwalior, commented that 'all the nautch (dancing) sets have young girls, many of whom have been purchased in this or other independent territories', and suggested that troupes be required to register them. Noting that the troupes would probably evade the charge of slave-trading by claiming that the girls had been freely given by impoverished parents, he questioned 'whether this plea should be admitted and whether parents should be allowed to give their children to persons of ill repute and educating them for the purpose of prostitution.'[76] He even recommended that these children

be taken away from the dancing sets and brothels, although the Government of India was not willing to sanction such a measure (perhaps not surprising given British complicity in the use of young girls in cantonment brothels in British India).[77] Thus, despite the fact that Muslim law did not allow for the sale of girls for immoral purposes, this aspect of Islamic law was not used to free prostitutes and dancing girls from enslavement. Ideas of sexual exploitation connected to this 'immoral commerce' wove in and out of debates about slavery and represented the dark inverse of colonial constructions of benign domestic servitude.

Routes into slavery

The sale of young girls to dancing troops and brothels was problematic for the colonial state not only because it contravened emerging Victorian sexual morality but also because it blurred the boundaries between what were perceived to be legitimate and illegitimate routes into slavery—as well as raising issues about the unregulated movement of subjects across territorial boundaries. If domestic slavery as a static institution was imagined as outside the ambit of colonial control, a more controversial issue, as Singha points out, was the degree to which the magistrate should 'police the boundary between the domestic sphere and the public traffic in women and children, on behalf of the state's own ideological and legal objectives'.[78] Thus, while the dominant paradigm of benign slavery was that of domestic slaves hereditarily attached to their master's homes and brought up almost as members of the family, colonial concern with slave-trafficking suggests that this was not always the case. Sir John Malcolm, discussing slavery in Malwa, noted that 'the slaves bred (to use a term suited to their condition) in this manner are not numerous', but that any shortfall in the slaves needed to maintain the domestic economies of elite households, as well as those of dancing troupes, brothels and mendicant religious orders, was supplied by an internal trade in women and children.[79] This trade was less easy to delineate from the violent and coercive aspects that characterised the African trade, or reconcile with ideas of mild familial slavery, and 'seemed to bring the public world of commodity embarrassingly close to the domestic sphere … [and] … indicated a dangerous fluidity in the boundaries of the household.'[80]

In some regions, slaves were sold openly at market. Markets existed in non-British India as late as the 1830s, and slave-dealing carried official sanction in many states. Mr Cavendish, Resident at Gwalior, reported that

> [in] the camp there are three slave markets; one belonging to Bala Bhaee, the sister of the late Maharaja; the other, called Mikhas, to the Regent herself, for horses, cattle and slaves; the third to Hindoo Rao her brother; and other

> public markets are established in the provinces. These princes, I regret to say, take a commission or percentage on the sale of slaves in their Bazaars, and their rivalry gives every encouragement to the trade.[81]

Similarly, Thomas Brooke, political agent for the Bareilly district, noted in 1811 that the towns of Nudgeebabad (Najibabad) and Augunah were 'established marts' for the sale of trafficked children, who were collected there in their hundreds, adding with concern that the deeds of purchase that attended the children sold at these slave markets were not executed by the children's parents, but by the slave-dealers, and did not specify the names of the parents, their place of residence or where and how the children were procured.[82] This was significant, as the colonial state differentiated between different routes into slavery and different mode of transporting and disposing of slaves when applying its legislation against slave-trafficking.

Slaves were acquired by various means, including distress sales, voluntary and debt bondage, kidnapping, coercion and deception. Although a number of routes into slavery were recognised by colonial officials, it was the coercive or violent acquisition and unregulated movement of slaves that primarily exercised British officials. Distress sales of children, though undesirable, were represented as understandable outcomes of poverty and starvation and colonial officials seem to have accepted the idea that such sales could act as a form of social safety net. As Thomas Brooke put it of the sale of children in Nepal and the hill country, and their traffic into British India,

> the misery of the parent, groaning under an oppressive government, and in a country where the productions of the earth are at the best of times scanty, are compelled to the sale of their offspring. These instances, by which the existence of the parents and children are preserved, induces the hesitation against a total abolition and whether it might not be more consonant with sound principles of humanity to establish rules by which abuses may be prevented.[83]

Similarly, the Judges of the Nizamat Adalat believed that the sale of children by their parents in times of hardship, 'however repugnant to the feelings', was in many cases 'beneficial to those who are thus deprived of their natural protection and support'.[84] The sale of female children in particular was understood in the context of the wider socio-economic costs associated with daughters. Major R. J. Meade, the AGG for Central India, for example, commented,

> the voluntary sale of children by parents and guardians chiefly occurs at times of famine … Occasionally, however, females are so disposed of when there is no excuse on the above grounds for so unnatural a proceeding. In such cases

> the cause, doubtless, is the inability of the parent or guardian to provide for or meet the expense of marrying off the child.[85]

In the context of the widespread and socially sanctioned preference for sons, as well as gender-specific customs like dowry and marriage costs, the distress sale of daughters seemed excusable. Indeed, the Resident at Satara even commented that 'such a sale may prevent the more serious crime of infanticide'.[86]

Because of its function as a form of famine relief, for which the colonial state was not keen to take responsibility, some colonial officials believed that outlawing this trade would do more harm than good. Mr W. Blunt, for example, reported in 1814 that the mistaken opinion among magistrates, police and inhabitants that Regulation X of 1811 (of which more in the next chapter) outlawed all sale or purchase of slaves, rather than just their import or export to/from foreign territories for sale, put at risk the lives of

> the infants and children of the poorer classes of the inhabitants in these provinces, which in seasons of scarcity, similar to the last, in which their parents may be unable to support them, must fall sacrifice by famine to a mistaken principle of humanity, when those lives might not only have been preserved, but in all probability the future condition and happiness of the individual bettered and advanced under a state of bondage differing so widely, as that state is well known to do in Asia, from all other countries.[87]

Indeed, he added that, in his opinion,

> the district of Agra furnished a dreadful example in the last year of the effects of the prohibition alluded to in the spectacle it presented of thousands of starving children, abandoned by their parents, or expiring in their arms from hunger, whose lives might have been saved had their parents been suffered to dispose of them to the wealthier part of the community.[88]

Similarly, the Nizamat Adalat noted that if the practice was 'entirely abrogated and forbidden under legal penalties, without providing some means of saving the lives of those who are thus disposed of, with a view to prevent their perishing by famine, it is to be feared that more serious consequences might ensue than any now experienced', adding that the practice was sanctioned under Hindu but not Islamic law.[89]

Famine sales forced the EIC to negotiate competing pragmatic and ideological imperatives. On the one hand, the sale of free children into slavery conflicted with its professed anti-slavery sentiment, while on the other, it supplied some degree of amelioration to the issue of poverty and starvation—a real consideration in a country where death rates for individual

famines were often measured in the hundreds of thousands. As the colonial state was unwilling to take upon itself the expense of a full famine relief programme and preferred to see indigents supported from within their own communities, it was loath to interfere with the existing mechanisms. One possible solution to these apparent tensions, put forward in 1815, was that the sale of self or relatives into slavery might be replaced by a form of indenture, with those in need being 'at liberty to dispose of their own services, or those of their children for a limited period, such as would be sufficient to indemnify the purchaser, without subjecting the parties to perpetual slavery'.[90] Government approved the Nizamat Adalat's offer to draft a regulation including a provision to this effect (together with clauses for the judicial emancipation of slaves on proof of 'cruel mistreatment' and other provisions 'for checking and reforming the abuses that have crept into the practice, and at present exist, with respect to slavery') although it is not clear that it was ever implemented.[91] Certainly, the EIC continued to tolerate distress sales into slavery for some years to come. In Assam, in 1829, the government agreed to relinquish all claims of the state to the services of individuals who might wish to 'contract an obligation to serve private individuals for their lives' as a result of the ongoing famine. For this action, however, the EIC government received a sharp rebuke from the Court of Directors, which noted that such proceedings had 'at least a very questionable character', adding that it would have preferred the government to provide temporary relief to the famine victims rather than allow this expedient, on the basis that 'slavery in every form is a great evil, and peculiarly revolting to the moral feelings of Englishmen'.[92] Such interventions suggest the extent to which abolitionist pressure was beginning to mount at home at the end of the 1820s, even if it was not directed towards India for another decade.

Not all colonial officials agreed that tolerating slavery was an acceptable price to pay for potentially limiting famine deaths, of course.[93] Richardson, arguing in favour of the abolition of slavery in 1808, dismissed this position on the basis that

> [it] is argued, that were slavery abolished many wretches would perish in times of extreme scarcity and famine. Admit that some would perish, those would be chiefly the infirm and superfluous in towns, not the industrious cultivators or the ploughmen, whom the proprietors of villages would preserve with their produce. I am moreover convinced, that the population would subsequently grow so much faster among the surviving freemen than it does, or even can, among bondsmen, that it would more than counterbalance, supposing the fact established, the diminution sustained in consequence of the future purchase of slaves being prohibited. Many in that case, which the first alarm of scarcity or famine terrifies into bondage, would assuredly find various modes of subsistence; and though there might not

> be more, or so many souls existing on the return of plenty, yet there would be more free men living, which are undoubtedly the most industrious and useful subjects a state can have, and would, by speedy increase, more than compensate.[94]

Despite such Malthusian interventions, most EIC officials were willing to tolerate distress sales as the lesser of two evils, at least until the 1830s, and EIC focus was not so much concerned with preventing the sale or transfer of slaves altogether, but limiting it to acceptable channels. J. Corbett, Resident for Harauti, for example, commented on a proclamation against the slave trade in Kota:

> I am not so sanguine as to suppose that [it] was ever intended to suppress the traffic completely … but I feel assured that it will effectually tend to deprive the traffic of its cruellest features, viz., the kidnapping of children from the adjacent states, since it will not be lawful for any one to sell or purchase a child in the Kotah territories without proving the transaction to be by the consent of the parents or relatives.[95]

He added that Maharao Ram Singh II had 'very properly' refused to buy two children from a dealer 'unless the parents came forward to signify their consent to the transaction'.[96] In Jodhpur, in 1841, the Hakim of Puchbudra successfully defended the sale of children in his area on the grounds that the dealers 'employ neither deceit nor stratagems in selling them', stating that their parents had sold them due to famine.[97]

Determining between 'legitimate' distress sales and coercive acquisitions was not always easy, of course, nor were colonial officials always in agreement over how this should be adjudged. In the case of forty-three slave-children imported from the hill country in Nepal into the British territories around Bareilly, in 1811, the local political agent noted that as there was no proof that the slave-dealers had obtained the children 'fraudulently' he had not taken them into custody. His superior officer, Thomas Brooke, however, questioned whether there was any evidence of them having been legally purchased, and argued that in the absence of proof to the contrary 'fraud of some sort may be presumed'. He advised that in future cases the guilty parties should be handed over to the Nepali authorities, although this was not something government was willing to sanction.[98] By directing that in the absence of proof to the contrary slave sales should be assumed to be lawful, the EIC put the burden of proof on the slave to show s/he had been acquired illegally, rather than on the owner/dealer to prove their legitimate ownership.[99]

The problem with colonial accounts that presented enslavement as a legitimate alternative to starvation was that not all of the individuals

involved in distress sales were acquired as willingly as some colonial officials suggested. Although it is clear that distress sales during times of famine did occur, the tendency of EIC officials to accept that this was always a beneficial practice, voluntarily entered into, is problematic. In one 1793 case, four children rescued from a slave-dealer's house claimed that they had been enticed by the promise of food into going with the procurer, before being held against their will by a slave-dealer. In his defence, the procurer claimed that when he had asked the children if they had parents they replied, 'We have no one. If anyone will take us, we will remain with them.' At least two of the children had fathers, however, who not only went looking for them but took their complaints to the colonial authorities and thus effected their children's release.[100] Similarly, A. D. Campbell, the acting superintendent of police for Madras, reported in 1818 that in the course of one day no fewer than eight different people had complained to him of the loss of their children. 'These parents are in general of the very lowest description of the people,' he noted, 'but their unfeigned distress and great anxiety for the recovery of their children, whom they will perhaps find it difficult to support, evince feelings that would do honour to the highest classes of the community.' Such children, he maintained, were enticed away by women 'of the most infamous character', who then gave them Muslim names and sold them as their own children to members of prominent local Muslim families, including those of the Nawab of the Carnatic, who secreted them in the seclusion of the 'seraglio'. As a solution to this problem, Campbell wished to have the Nawab and his family, as well as other prominent Muslim families in the area, send every child they intended to buy to the police office, so that they could establish, prior to purchase, whether they had been kidnapped or not. Without such a rule, he maintained, any subsequent inquiries would be fruitless, as the children would already have been incorporated into the *zenana* and any interference would be seen as a violation of private domestic arrangements. Perhaps not surprisingly, this suggestion was not adopted.[101]

If small children might be kidnapped, young women could also be subject to deceptive strategies of acquisition. H. M. Pigow, assistant in charge at Zellapore, Dacca, for example, noted that they might be enticed away from their friends and relatives 'under pretence of marriage' and afterwards disposed of either to public women or to rich individuals as servants for their *zenanas*.[102] Even apparently legitimate transactions could be falsified. In 1793, James Rees recited the testimony of an escaped slave who claimed that she and her sisters had been 'surprised by a gang of ruffians, seized and put on board a boat, and carried away from her native place near Dacca'. She was eventually sold to a brothel owner for the 'paltry sum' of twenty-two rupees and was 'compelled to sign a paper in favour of the bawd'.[103] An escaped slave would, of course, have good reason to portray her capture as one of

violence to a potential rescuer, but there is ample evidence that at least some apparent distress sales involved more-complex relationships of complicity and coercion than the simplified colonial discourse of voluntary self-sale implies. Compare, for example, the assertion by EIC magistrate J. Sage, that 'It is common practice amongst the lowest class of native women, on the loss of their husband, or at times of scarcity of grain … to sell their children, by which the mothers gain a livelihood, and the children are much better taken care of by their new masters, than had they continued with their parents',[104] with the following case of Kishnee and her family.

Kishnee, a British subject, came to Agra with her four children in search of work when her husband died in 1830. Once there, three chumars approached her and offered to buy her children, as she was unable to provide for them. Although she refused to sell her children, she did accept the men's secondary offer, which was to find her some form of employment, and went with them to a village on the other side of the Chumbal River, outside British territory. Once there, the chumars immediately sold the family to a slave-dealer, who in turn sold them to a man named Buxa, who took them all to Gwalior, where he sold the four children and kept Kishnee in confinement. Twelve other women were found in Buxa's house when the Gwalior authorities raided it and many more had passed through and been sold on in the two months Kishnee was there. Her wish, on being liberated, was to reclaim her children and then return to Agra to find work. The British Resident agreed to try to recover her children, but feared that this would prove impossible if they had disappeared into the zenanas of their purchasers. Ultimately only one of Kishnee's children was found and returned to her, the others having passed into private households, beyond the reach of colonial influence.[105]

Kishnee, by her own admission, entered into some sort of agreement with the men who originally approached her, yet it does not appear to have been her intention to enter a perpetual state of slavery, nor to be separated from her children. Statements such as that by Sage, which were generally accepted as representing the reality of distress sales, thus fall very far short of capturing the complex, traumatic and sometimes unintended situations in which impoverished parents found themselves. As Thomas Brooke, the political agent for Bareilly, put it of the traffic in women and children from Nepal, 'the traffic, although divested of the enormities of the African slave trade, is still attended with circumstances of cruelty, which can only be put a stop to by the imposition of government.'[106] The suggestion that slaves were procured by coercive means, including deception, kidnap and even murder, destabilised constructions of benign domestic slavery by reinserting the issues of natal alienation and familial rupture that so dominated British abolitionist discourse on African slavery.

Conclusion

Given the complexity of India's internal slave trade, EIC interventions to limit or control those aspects of the traffic that it deemed problematic, such as the kidnapping and inveigling away of free children from their parents or existing slaves from their masters, had to be constructed carefully so as not to encroach on what they deemed to be slave-holders' legitimate right to property, the Indian elite's domestic autonomy or the social safety net offered by 'genuine' distress sales. Of course, discussions of distress sales as a voluntary 'good' trade and of the kidnapping and trafficking of 'free' children as an affront to abolitionist sentiment are problematic. As Indrani Chatterjee points out, some at least of the children supposedly stolen from 'free' parents were in fact existing slaves enticed away from their rightful masters, and EIC concern with preventing this traffic was as much about upholding the rights of the slave-holders over their property as they were about anti-slavery sentiment. Indeed, Chatterjee argues that, far from being interested in emancipation, the protection of the master's right in their slaves, even to the extent of state intervention in the restitution of fugitives, was the primary focus of EIC regulation in the early nineteenth century. 'From the way the decrees and statutes were worded,' she argues, 'the issue of protection to a slave became synonymous with protection of the master's claims in a slave.'[107] Because she considers the majority of trafficked individuals to have been existing slaves who had been enticed away from their lawful masters rather than freeborn children kidnapped from their biological families, Chatterjee interprets EIC interventions to prevent illicit slave trades as a protection both of the property rights of the slave-owner and of the domestic market against the encroachment of foreign powers, be these other European states or semi-independent Indian states. The next chapter looks in more detail at the relationship between the EIC and the princely states, exploring how slave-trafficking intersected with wider colonial concerns about law and order and with debates about the nature and limits of colonial authority in areas outside its directly administered territories.

Notes

1 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), p. 22.
2 Ibid.
3 National Archives of India, Delhi, Foreign Department Records, Political (henceforth FDR-P), 7–8, Oct. 1862, Meade to Govt India, 15 Sept. 1862.
4 PP 1828, pp. 371–6.
5 Ibid., pp. 373–4.

6 Veena Talwar Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow, India', *Feminist Studies* 16.2 (1990): 266.
7 PP 1828, p. 372.
8 Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance', p. 246.
9 Ibid., p. 264.
10 Sumanta Banerjee, *Dangerous Outcast: The Prostitute in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998), p. 145.
11 Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 187.
12 Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance', p. 284.
13 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, pp. 195–6.
14 PP 1828, p. 374.
15 Ibid., p. 375.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 372.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Radhika Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic: Criminal Law and the "Head of the Household", 1772–1843', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 33.3 (1996): 310.
21 Ibid., p. 309.
22 Bernard S. Cohn, 'Law and the Colonial State in India', in June Starr and Jane Fishburne Collier (eds), *History and Power in the Study of Law: New Directions in Legal Anthropology* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 132.
23 Nancy Gardner Cassels, 'Social Legislation under the Company Raj: The Abolition of Slavery Act V 1843', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 11.1 (1988): 3.
24 Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or, Ordinations of the Pundits* (London: s.n. 1776).
25 Sir William Jones, *Institutes of Hindu Law; or the Ordinances of Menu, According to the Gloss of Cullúca, Comprising the Indian System of Duties Religious and Civil* (Calcutta: Printed by order of the government, 1794), p. 242.
26 Cassels, 'Social Legislation', p. 63.
27 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 185.
28 Markus Vink, '"The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of World History* 14.2 (2003): 150.
29 Cassels, 'Social Legislation', p. 3
30 PP 1828, p. 13.
31 'If slavery be allowed,' Stonehouse had asked, 'I wish to be informed whether I am to refer questions of this nature to the laws and customs of the Hindoos and the Mahometans, and the native Christians respectively, or what other rules are to guide me in determining the circumstances, periods, and authentications of cabalas and engagements, which are to be considered as constitutive of slavery in this portion of the British dominions in India.' Ibid., p. 74.
32 Cassels, 'Social Legislation', p. 3 Of course, not all colonial officials approved of a indiscriminate adherence to the precepts of Hindu and Muslim laws. As early as 1793, an EIC judge could lament what he saw as the relatively light sentence imposed on a woman convicted of kidnapping children and selling them as slaves: 'What says the futwa, which, regulated by Mussulman justice, weighs, it would seem,

in the same scale of moral turpitude, the stealing of a cur dog and the kidnapping of a child. Thirty-five strokes with a rattan and four months' confinement, which if changed to hard labour and imprisonment for life, although still disproportionate to the extent of her offence (indeed, what degree of legal rigour can reach it) might, perhaps, eventually operate to deter others from the practice of similar enormities.' PP 1828, pp. 55–8.

33 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law.*

34 For example, its refusal to adhere to the ban on capital punishment for Brahmins. See Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

35 See Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

36 In response to Richardson's letter in 1808, the Nizamut Adalat collected the legal opinions of its Muslim muftis and Hindu pandits concerning Muslim and Hindu slave law and forwarded them to Richardson, inviting him to draft a Regulation for modifying existing laws. Richardson based this draft upon Muslim law on the basis that 'the Mussulman law being the law by which we govern in cases of life and limb, surely it ought to be extended to personal freedom, for from personal freedom alone can life or limb, the first gifts of nature acquire their due value', although the fact that Islamic law had a limited conception of legitimate circumstances for enslavement also fitted his abolitionist agenda. PP 1828, p. 317.

37 Ibid., p. 921.

38 Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic', p. 311.

39 Ibid., p. 316.

40 Ibid.

41 William Tennant, *Indian Recreations: Consisting Chiefly of Strictures on the Domestic and Rural Economy of the Mahommedans & Hindoos*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: C. Stewart, 1803), p. 136.

42 PP 1828, p. 915.

43 James Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs* (London: 1813), p. 168.

44 FDR-P, 7–8, Oct. 1862, Lawrence to Govt India, 20 Jan. 1862.

45 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 128 (1834) (henceforth PP 1834), p. 7.

46 PP 1828, p. 897.

47 Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807), vol. 1, p. 73

48 Parliamentary Papers, session 1837–8 (215), vol. XLVIII (henceforth PP 1837–8), p. 60.

49 Ibid., p. 62.

50 PP 1828, p. 115.

51 Cited in Sylvia Vatuk, 'Bharattee's Death: Domestic Slave-Women in Nineteenth-Century Madras', in Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Maxwell Eaton (eds), *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 221.

52 PP 1828, p. 225.

53 Ibid., p. 96 (see Chap. 3, above).

54 Bharatee was accused of enticing away other slave-girls and selling them, although there is little evidence to prove this assertion either way. Vatuk, 'Bharattee's Death'.

55 PP 1834, p. 7.

56 Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic', p. 310.

57 Singha, *A Despotism of Law*, pp. 129–30.
58 Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic', pp. 311–12.
59 PP 1828, p. 246.
60 Ibid., p. 402.
61 Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', p. 151.
62 Varsha Joshi, *Polygamy and Purdah: Women and Society among Rajputs* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1995), pp. 153–72.
63 For more on the role of domestic slaves and concubines within the Rajput household, see ibid.; Ramya Sreenivasan, 'Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines: Female Slaves in Rajput Polity, 1500–1850', Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*, pp. 136–61.
64 Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic', p. 316.
65 PP 1828, p. 299.
66 For more on British fantasies of the harem, see Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2000).
67 Cassels, 'Social Legislation', p. 85.
68 PP 1828, p. 403.
69 Ibid., p. 92.
70 Singha, *A Despotism of Law*, pp. 157–8.
71 PP 1828, p. 299.
72 Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 28.
73 See Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance'; Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct*.
74 Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct*, pp. 27–8.
75 PP 1828, pp. 935.
76 PP 1837–8, p. 65.
77 Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', p. 155. Indeed, Chatterjee notes that British government attempts to regulate and tax Indian sex workers in cantonment brothels only increased the indebtedness of these slave-prostitutes.
78 Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic', p. 316.
79 For more on the use of slaves by mendicant religious orders, see Vijay Pinch, 'Gosain Tawaif: Slaves, Sex, and Ascetics in Rasdhan, *c.*1800–1857', *Modern Asian Studies* 38.3 (2004): 559–97.
80 Singha, *A Despotism of Law*, pp. 126–7.
81 PP 1837–8, p. 62.
82 PP 1828, p. 115.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., p. 245.
85 FDR-P, 7–8, Oct 1862, Meade to Govt India, 15 Sept 1862.
86 PP 1837–8, p. 66. For more on British engagements with infanticide, see, Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Satadru Sen, 'The Savage Family: Colonialism and Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century India', *Journal of Women's History* 14: 3 (2002): 53–79.
87 PP 1828, p. 326.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., p. 324.
90 Ibid., p. 325.

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., pp. 9–10.
93 Although it might provide an escape mechanism for some individuals, it is not clear whether distress sales during famines actually had a significant impact on mortality rates as we do not have reliable records detailing the numbers sold into slavery in this way.
94 PP 1828, p. 300.
95 PP 1837–8, p. 63.
96 Ibid.
97 India Office Records, British Library, London, Board's Collection (henceforth BC) 107684, 1847, F/4/2194, Agency Vakeel, 27 Nov. 1840.
98 PP 1828, p. 116.
99 Ibid., p. 118.
100 Ibid., pp. 57–8.
101 Ibid., p. 901.
102 Ibid., p. 248.
103 Ibid., p. 49.
104 Ibid., p. 247.
105 PP 1837–8, p. 61.
106 PP 1828, p. 115.
107 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 177.

5

'Open and Professed Stealers of Children': Slave-trafficking and the Boundaries of the Colonial State

Indrani Chatterjee has written that 'arguments over territorial jurisdiction of law as well as "customary" social practices in the conduct of diplomatic relations between the British government of India and the "princely states" of the subcontinent constituted many different barriers to [the] delegalisation [of slavery].'[1] Colonial officials, she suggests, 'tried to play the abolitionist card selectively' and, as a result, the British residency system led to 'few general prohibitions or proclamations against the land-based trade or the keeping of slaves'.[2] This chapter explores these ideas further, arguing that although Chatterjee's assessment is accurate for domestic slavery when imagined as a static internal institution, where the land-based trade involved the coercive acquisition of slaves and the illegitimate movement of people across territorial boundaries, it exercised significant British attention, being subsumed into wider colonial conceptions of criminality, itinerancy and stability. It will use the example of the debates that took place over slave-trading between the Rajput and Maratha states and British India to explore the various political, ideological and 'moral' imperatives that informed British officials' attitudes towards slavery and slave-trading in India. In particular it will look at the implications of these debates for our understanding of the limits of British 'authority', using the example of illegally procured slaves to demonstrate the fluid manner in which individuals could move, or be moved, between British and Indian controlled spaces, physically and metaphorically, and the extent to which British influence was in practice limited, both spatially and ideologically.

The way in which official EIC policy was implemented, as well as the pragmatic considerations that informed their debates about slavery and slave-trading, suggest that their primary concern was not with abolitionism or emancipation but with preventing a volatile and destabilising trade across their borders, and settling, rather than eradicating, the practice of slavery

and slave-ownership within their provinces. The British did not seek to prevent the sale or transfer of children altogether, therefore, but rather to end involuntary, coercive or deceitful modes of acquisition and the subsequent movement of illegitimately procured slaves across territorial boundaries.[3] Thus, although most British officials maintained a theoretical opposition to slave-trading in principle, in practical terms it was not the transfer of domestic slaves that they objected to, but illegitimate, coercive and destabilising means of acquiring them. Moreover, humanitarian rejections of the 'moral' legitimacy of such routes into slavery were often secondary to pragmatic considerations about the impact of the trade on social and economic stability of the regions affected and the implications for law and order in British India. In June 1832, for example, the Resident of Harauti, R. Ross, reported that Ram Singh II of Kota had instructed a slave-dealer to purchase four female slaves from Jodhpur on his behalf, commenting,

> This mode of supplying the *zenanas* of the chiefs and other wealthy individuals, which obtains more or less throughout Rajwarra, is I am sorry to say very prevalent in Hurrowtee. In Boondee in particular a great number of the *burda furosh* [slave-dealer] class reside … It is to be feared that a great proportion of those consigned to foreign slavery are kidnapped, that being the cheapest way of procuring them; and it must therefore be obvious that the employment and protection of the *burda furosh* class is calculated to carry either actual or apprehended distress to every village throughout the tract in which they prosecute this detestable traffic, a tract which compromises not only the whole of Rajpootana and Malwa, but extends through Gujerat to the sea.[4]

As had been the case with the prohibitions against slave-trafficking by other European powers in the late eighteenth century, British attitudes to slave-trading in their Indian dominions reflected the pragmatic political expediencies of the EIC state as it solidified and extended its control in various parts of the subcontinent. In particular, the focus primarily on the import and export of slaves rather than their internal trade and transfer, and the prominence that 'frontier' regions such as Delhi, Agra, Dacca and Nepal received within these debates, suggest a concern with settling and pacifying turbulent areas and asserting state authority over its subjects and borders, rather than with slavery as a static institution.

Despite British attempts to regulate Indian landholdings and fashion unitary states out of 'the pre-existing interlaced and overlapping sovereignties that loosely linked large tracts of territory and large numbers of people',[5] the frontier between colonial and independent India was neither static nor distinct in the nineteenth century and people could move across these blurred boundaries with relative ease. Territorially, although there were

significant areas of north India dominated exclusively by Indian states, many of the smaller principalities were intermingled with British territory, and neighbouring villages often fell under conflicting jurisdictions. This situation caused considerable problems, as British subjects could evade colonial jurisdiction by entering independent territories, while itinerant groups from other states could have a destabilising impact on British-controlled areas. As Malavika Kasturi discusses, the existence of 'internal frontiers' and alternative power centres in areas where British and Indian territory met or intermingled was a source of significant concern.[6] As a large area outside direct British control, the princely states, especially those dominated by supposedly volatile and warlike Rajput or Maratha clans, were often marginalised in European constructions of India: wild, dangerous lands on the peripheries of the known, pacified, British territory. Such ideas were reinforced by tribal insurrections and general 'lawlessness' in some remote areas as well as by the problems of incorporating 'turbulent' clans into the ever-expanding limits of British north India. Historically speaking, the various princely states were not as remote as later constructions of 'British India' would suggest; in the pre-colonial period, Rajputana, for example, was far from isolated, as routes through this region formed major commercial links between Delhi and Agra and the western seaports of Cambay (Khambhat), Surat and Bombay (Mumbai). With the formation of the imperial state, however, such pre-existing networks and routes came into conflict with British ideas about unitary states and discrete borders, making the traditional movements of some itinerant groups problematic for the colonial state.

Colonial anxiety about slave-trading between Indian and British territories must be understood in the context of wider projects to foster unitary states and settled agricultural communities and to limit the destabilising influence of unregulated movement within and across borders. Rajputana, for example, was seen as a centre of slave-trafficking, the destabilising influence of which not only crossed internal frontiers but also radiated out and affected contiguous areas of British India. Moreover, the impact of the trade was bi-directional, with subjects of both British India and other Indian states being kidnapped for sale in Rajput areas, while Rajput slaves were also exported for sale elsewhere. In 1813, Charles Metcalfe reported that a man from Peshawar had been apprehended importing slave-children procured in Rajputana for sale in Delhi, noting at the same time that this was not a lone instance of slaves 'purchased, inveigled or stolen' from the princely states being imported into British India. Similarly, in 1821, Sir John Malcolm noted that most Malwa slaves had been procured in Rajputana, where the 'excesses of the Marathas', combined with frequent famine, forced people into exile and destitution.[7] In British India, in December 1832, it was reported that thirteen known cases of kidnapped children had occurred in

the Delhi territories (compared with ten in 1829). This problem was said to be particularly prevalent in the Agra district because of the 'facilities that exist of disposing of the children by sale in the adjoining native states'.[8] As the Acting Magistrate for Agra put it in 1829,

> A glance at the local position of Agra on the map of these provinces will explain at once the chief cause of the evil in this district. Surrounded to the west and south frontier by independent native states, it presents almost the nearest point to them from whence the slave trade in these countries can be supplied in any degree from the company's territory.[9]

He went on to complain,

> The demand and countenance given to the trade by the Dholpore and Gwalior states is the sole cause of the crime of child stealing to any extent here. The ready sale of a young girl or woman for a sum equivalent to the hire of a labourer for a year is too great a temptation to the practices of stealing and abduction in all their forms to be resisted. Professed kidnappers from time to time, as opportunity serves, continue their illicit calling and bad characters of every description are induced to follow their example whenever a child unseen or discontented wife fall in their way.[10]

Such a trade was both a humanitarian and a social order issue for the British, as 'illegitimate' migration and itinerancy, as well as kidnap and murder, were seen as symptomatic of a more general lawlessness in the peripheral areas of British India. For Richardson, absconding slaves themselves also presented a problem of stability:

> If lucky enough to evade discovery, they seek a retreat in the fastnesses of the woods and associate with men in similar circumstances. In daily terror of apprehension, they cannot cultivate the soil; they cannot hire to service, dreading detection; they must live, and by what means, the most obvious only are, theft and plunder. Long familiarity with scenes of rapine hardens their hearts to delight in acts the most atrocious, till at last, not only robbery, but murder become amongst the wanton sports of the day. The state thus loses not only the labour of these banditti themselves, but the exertions and pains of the industrious and inoffensive are rendered abortive by the predatory incursions of such freebooters.[11]

It also reflected concern with itinerancy and migrancy—the sturdy beggar and the wandering poor. In March 1816, J. Ewing, the Magistrate of Zillah Sylhet in the Dacca division, noted that 'instances frequently occurred of young girls and female children being kidnapped, or enticed away from this district in order to be sold into prostitution in Dacca and other places. The

persons who committed this offence were generally fackeers [*fakirs*, Muslim ascetics], or wandering bazeegurs [a community of wandering entertainers, sometimes conflated with gypsies]."[12] Similarly, in June 1832, the Resident at Gwalior commented, 'Two evils, in my opinion, require the urgent and authoritative interference of the Supreme Government; the first is the slave trade, which is a nuisance and a great grievance to all contiguous states ... and the second is the asylum and protection afforded to thugs."[13]

The association between slave-trading and the supposed pan-Indian criminal conspiracy of highway robbers and murders '*thuggee*' [*thagi*], suggested above, is particularly relevant, suggesting a connection in the British mind between slave-trading, itinerancy and more serious lawlessness.[14] Indeed, *thuggee* and slave-trading were linked explicitly in 1839 when William Sleeman published his report on 'Megpunnaism', a 'new system' of *thuggee* in which groups operating between Delhi, Agra and the Rajput states murdered travellers specifically in order to steal their children and sell them into slavery.[15] As recent works on *thuggee* have demonstrated, the colonial association of thugs with itinerant merchants groups like *banjarras* and slave-dealers demonstrated British unease with the role of 'wandering' populations and a tendency to collapse various forms of itinerancy into more serious criminal activity as well as to see crime as professional, hereditary and caste based.[16] Sir John Malcolm, for example, noted that demand for domestic slaves was 'supplied by the Binjarries, who import females into and from Gujarat and other countries ... and by the tribe of Gwarriah, who have been noted as open and professed stealers of female children."[17] In 1819, John Briggs, the political agent in Candeish, noted the trade in slaves carried on locally by Rajput *banjarras* (a nomadic tribal group from north-west India, sometimes referred to as gypsies), with whom, he claimed, 'the practice of carrying off children from one part of the country for sale in another is not unusual'. The conflation between slave-trading and itinerant lawlessness was not confined to Rajputana, of course, but was seen as 'indicative of pressure on the productive cycle or an unsettled state of society', involving wandering communities of criminal gangs whose activities or commerce the colonial state 'found difficult to police'.[18] The Magistrate Agra in 1829, for example, referred to the continued existence of 'the profession of kidnapper' in that region,[19] while in 1841, the Resident for the Thuggee and Dacoity Department at Gwalior reported the arrest of six people for slave-dealing in the Chambal region, saying,

> The existence of the numerous desperate gangs of *dacoits* and the present formidable state of crime in these districts is to be attributed to the impunity with which these bands have hitherto been allowed to prey on the lives and property of our subjects and the unwillingness of the durbar to consent to

> any effective measures for their eradication. As from the circumstances now brought to notice it appears that the measures of the durbar for the abolition of the slave trade, like those for the prevention of infanticide, have proved ineffectual.[20]

Significantly, as Singha points out, legislation against *thuggee* provided a useful short cut in tackling other crimes that seemed to be the preserve of organised gangs, including the traffic in women and children.[21] Thus, although the British often couched their discussion of the 'abominable traffic' of the slave trade in the humanitarian language of the abolitionist movement at home, in practice it was understood primarily in terms of law and order, as British officials delineated between the benign institution of domestic slavery and the criminal practice of slave-trafficking. The blurred boundaries between the justificatory discourse of civilising mission and the stability issues at the centre of EIC thinking can be seen in a letter from the Governor-General to the Court of Directors in September 1816, which noted that on their assumption of the government of the Kumaon region the EIC had abolished slave-trading and the tax on the sale of slaves, noting 'A slave trade of great extent has been totally extinguished, and the helpless families, from whom the Gholkas used to tear away the children for sale, have now to look with joyful confidence on the security bestowed upon their offspring by the British government.'[22]

Colonial interventions

Richardson was not the only colonial official taking a personal interest in the subject of slavery in the early years of the nineteenth century. In the same year that he penned his letter on the subject, 1808, Mr Seton, the Resident for newly acquired area around Delhi, noted with concern that children were being kidnapped in Kota and sold as slaves in the British territories near Delhi. Although the kidnapping itself took place outside British jurisdiction, the importation and sale of these slaves in British India, though not at this point illegal, was presented by Seton as both a moral and a social order problem and it was on this basis that he sought, informally, to intervene. Believing that 'this detestable species of traffic was a source of too great a benefit to the persons engaged in it to leave the prospect of its being easily relinquished by the merchants',[23] Seton enlisted the assistance of Raja Zalim Singh, the 'virtual ruler of Kotah', explaining to him the 'misery which parents as well as children suffered from this cruel practice'. Zalim Singh, apparently pleased with the mark of attention that Seton's overtures represented, caused 'all slave-traders of this description' to quit his territory, with the result that the practice was apparently, for a time at least, greatly diminished.[24]

Seton had a history of anti-slavery sentiment: in 1790, as Magistrate for Gya, he had interposed to prevent a convicted murderer transferring his son into slavery in lieu of blood money to the deceased's family, despite the fact that such a practice was sanctioned under Muslim law.[25] In 1808, his actions were likewise based on a personal assessment of the moral and political implications of the trade for the area under his control and his limited success was achieved solely through informal negotiations with the local ruler, there being at that time no official legislation to prevent the trade in slaves between the princely states and British India beyond the 1774 and 1789/90 acts. Similar circumstances attended the efforts of the AGG for the Ceded Provinces, Thomas Brooke, when in 1811 he sought to suppress the traffic in children from Nepal into the area around Bareilly. This trade was brought to his attention when Duskrut Singh, an officer of the Nepal government, wrote to the local political agent and asked that they assist him in suppressing the trade between the hills and the EIC territories. Brooke in response wrote to the local magistrates under his jurisdiction requesting them to prohibit this trade while he made reference to government on the matter. He noted that

> [it] is not improbable that in many instances the misery of the parents may compel them to the sale of their offspring, but I am persuaded, from the circumstances which have come to my knowledge, that numerous children are inveigled away, some secretly stolen, and instances are not infrequent where they are forcibly carried off. But the traffic, under whatever circumstances it is carried on, is so repugnant to the principles of our government, and so uncountenanced by either Musselman or Hindu law, that it justifies the most vigorous measures of government to put a stop to it.[26]

Government's response was that while the prohibitions issued by the magistrate were 'irregular, lacking the authority of government that would make them law, the moral principle, abstract justice and humane object of these measures, combined with the application from the government of Nepal, precludes his Excellency in Council from withdrawing his acquiescence.'[27]

In the wake of the British prohibition of the transatlantic slave trade, then, colonial officials in India began to discuss the idea putting an end not only to European slave trades, as had been the case in the late eighteenth century, but also to land-based trades within and over the borders of their territories. As they were not willing to intervene to suppress slavery *in toto*, however, the specific contexts in which slave-trading should be prohibited, and those in which it might be allowed, were the subject of debate. Thomas Brooke summed up the problem when he commented that

it appears desirable that the whole class of people who purchase children with a view to a future sale, should be subject to severe penalties, and the magistrates should be directed to strictly prohibit any of the towns in the British territories being a mart for the reception and sale of children. But the rules which may be established against slave-traders are not applicable to persons who may purchase slaves for their own service, without the intention of resale; it becomes, therefore a distinct consideration how these persons are to be dealt with. Established rules, if the practice is to be allowed, become necessary, otherwise a door is left open for successful evasion.[28]

The legislative response came in 1811, when the government of Bengal passed Regulation X of 1811, by which the movement of slaves for sale, by land or sea, into the British territories was prohibited.[29] The terms of this prohibition were limited in their application, being 'confined in their object to the trade in slaves by importation or exportation'. It did not extend to the emancipation of persons already in a state of slavery, 'nor to the prohibition of their transfer by sale to other masters within the country which they inhabit'.[30] This proclamation, though thus limited in its scope, set a legal precedent for British interference with slave-trading when that trade crossed the porous boundaries between British and princely India. Significantly, however, it was not to be enforced without discretion. With reference to the working of the proclamation in the Delhi area, which bordered many independent states, the government of Bengal expressed its concern that 'an unqualified adherence … to the terms [of the regulation] would impose upon you the necessity of liberating slaves, and even punishing the importers of them, whatever might be their condition or rank in life', adding that 'It is obviously necessary to guard against so inconvenient and embarrassing a consequence.'[31] It was suggested instead that discretion should be exercised in 'which the rank and condition of the party, combined with the circumstances, whether of a political, religious or other nature, attending his own entrance into our territories, would make it manifestly improper and inexpedient to interfere with his domestic concerns and arrangements.'[32] This may, in part, have reflected concern with the 'domestic arrangements' of the 'King of Delhi', the Mughal emperor Akbar Shah II (1760–1837) (also known as Mirza Akbar, who although still the titular ruler of India was by this point a pensioner of the British and whose authority was confined to his court at the Red Fort in Delhi) and his family, who Metcalfe was to inform personally of the prohibition, so as to avoid any embarrassing misunderstandings.[33] It also, however, suggests a concern with the sanctity of the domestic arrangements of travelling chiefs and nobles and the need to differentiate, informally at least, between those importing slaves for sale and those importing slaves as part of their household retinue. Such qualifications clearly demonstrate that,

whatever their personal interpretations of the morality of slavery and slave-trading, in practical terms British officials were not primarily concerned with the practice of slave-holding, or even with the sale of slaves, but with coercive modes of acquisition and the subsequent movement of slaves for sale across territorial boundaries. That their intentions were limited is further suggested by the fact that, when approving the government of Bombay's own version of Regulation X, in 1813, the Governor-General, Lord Minto, advised that the words 'And whereas it is fit that the Slave Trade should be effectually abolished where-so-ever it may be attempted to practise the same' be removed.[34] This was on the basis that the Regulation would be rendered more conformable with the 'tenor of the enacting clauses, and the principles which have dictated the depending arrangements' by their omission, suggesting that the Governor-General was wary of committing the EIC to outlaw all manifestations of slave-trading and sale. Similarly, four years later, the Vice President in Council underlined that

> the greatest care should be observed to guard against the prevalence of an impression among the natives that any general or direct interference in the existing relation of master and slave is contemplated by Government. Any impression of the nature might be expected to excite feelings of alarm and dissatisfaction.[35]

The same year that the EIC passed Regulation X, the British parliament passed the 'Slave Trade Felony Act' in May 1811 (51 Geo. 3 c. 23), which made trading in slaves a felony punishable by up to fourteen years' transportation. The extension of this metropolitan legislation to India caused considerable debate at the higher echelons of the EIC government, as well as considerable confusion among its local officials. As H. R. C. Wright notes, the debates about the Slave Trade Felony Act that took place in the British parliament referred only to the African slave trade, and 'members spoke of it as though it were the only one which existed or could concern them.'[36] When the act was drafted, however, its scope was expressly extended 'to the effectual abolition of the slave trade where-so-ever it may be attempted to practise it', and specifically included the East Indies, stating,

> If any person residing or being in any of the islands, or territories under the government of the United Company of Merchants trading to the East Indies shall carry away or remove as a slave or slaves, any person or persons whatsoever from any part of Africa, or from any other country, territory, or place whatsoever, any such persons as the aforesaid, for the purpose aforesaid; then in every such case the persons so offending are declared to be felons.[37]

The terms of the Slave Felony Act, which had clearly not been drafted with

the specific condition of Indian slavery in mind, seemed to conflict with the colonial state's commitment to respect indigenous law, something they had been careful to circumvent in their own legislation of 1811. Nancy Cassels notes that the 'expansive language' of the preamble to this Act encouraged some 'reform-minded Company servants to apply the law against the institution of slavery in India', but among others it caused considerable concern, as well as considerable debate about its implications, and about how it should be applied in India.[38] Governor-General Lord Minto, for example, noted that even if the Act were considered only to apply to slaves imported by sea, something about which there was doubt in official circles, it implementation presented considerable problems in the Indian context. As Minto pointed out to the Court of Directors, even in the limited context of the seaborne trade, the Slave Felony Act criminalised 'not only merchants of whatever nation conveying slaves for sale into settlement, or port of occupation of the Crown or the East India Company, but likewise individuals resorting to any such place who may be attended by slaves (which is common practice to the eastward)'.[39] He argued that if this was the case, the terms of the Act, as it would have to be applied in India, seemed to go far beyond the views of the legislature in abolishing the slave trade: transport of slaves with their owners around the West Indies was allowed by a specific clause in the Act, but the same right had not been extended to slave-owners in India. If extended to imports by land, as the Advocate General for Bombay believed it should be, the Act produced even greater problems, as it would criminalise Indian elites and nobles travelling internally with slaves in their entourages.[40] Yet if it were not extended to the land-based trade, the Act would be a dead letter, for, as the Advocate General of Fort St George noted, the ban on imports by sea would be easily evaded by landing slaves in the princely states and then bringing them over the border by land. He suggested instead that the clause in the act which allowed the movement of slaves around the British possessions in the West Indies should be extended to India. This would mean that slaves being transported between parts of British India, or even to foreign territories and back again, as part of their master's retinue, would retain that status and their owners not be subject to punishment.[41]

Ultimately, although Lord Minto admitted that he did not have the authority to dispense with the problematic Act altogether and had it publicised in the various government gazettes, he only had the Slave Felony Act promulgated in port areas, and did not have it circulated to the magistrates of India's landlocked districts. Indrani Chatterjee sees these actions as indicative of EIC tendencies to block emancipationist imperatives from the metropole, undermining any suggestion of a causal chain of events leading up to delegalisation in 1843.[42] Debates about the functioning of the Slave Felony Act were, however, as much about negotiating the nexus of authority

between the Government of India, the Court of Directors and the British parliament, and locating India within emerging metropolitan conceptions of the commercial and ideological networks of an interconnected empire, as they were about materially altering the condition of slaves in India. The EIC believed that its own legislation, Regulation X, carried out similar functions to the Slave Felony Act, in prohibiting the transport of slaves for sale over territorial boundaries between British India and the princely states, and much of the debate that followed the Slave Felony Act revolved around the questions of whether Regulation X was better adapted to Indian conditions than legislation imposed from Britain.

As Nancy Cassels suggests, the Slave Felony Act became the 'the corner-stone of legal debate and actual legislation concerning slavery in India for years to come'.[43] In a letter to the Court of Directors in October 1817, the Governor-General Lord Moira again raised the issue of the Act and its applicability to India. He argued that as the Act was primarily intended to check flagrant violations of the abolition of the African slave trade, its extension to the territories of the East Indies was probably meant to check the eastward trade in Africans from the East coast of Africa and Madagascar. This, he admitted, was a trade 'of a nature and tendency scarcely less objectionable than the trade which had been carried on between the western coast of Africa and the West Indian Islands'. Had the Act been intended also to apply to the removal of slaves by land in India, however, he believed that the clause allowing the movement of slaves not for sale around British territories in the West Indies would have been extended to India, as otherwise 'it would subject to punishment whole nations, amongst whom domestic slavery had immemorially existed under sanction of law recognised by Parliament' for acts that were still allowed in the West Indies.[44] Indeed, as the Act did not affect, or profess to affect, the relation between master and slave, wherever that relation might exist by law, the Hindu and Muslim laws on domestic slavery should remain in force. Indigenous Indian laws and codes had been recognised by parliament, which had ordered that they be observed, and 'it did not seem credible that any intention existed to abrogate those codes without reference to the established laws and usages of this country, and without repealing the Acts of Parliament by which the observance of them was guaranteed to the natives.'[45] The Advocate General for Bombay, Hugh George Macklin, similarly noted 'the contradiction that must arise from enforcing the Acts of Parliament relative to the slave trade in countries where domestic slavery is recognised by the Hindoo and Mahomedan laws, while the courts are bound to administer justice according to those laws.' The only way of reconciling this contradiction, he suggested, was to repeal those parts of the Hindu and Muslim laws that allowed slavery.[46] The Governor-General also raised his concern about how the Act would impact on their

proceedings when applications were made by governments of allied Indian states for the restoration of slaves who took refuge in the EIC's territories. 'A slave entering the Company's territories does not become free;' he noted,

> nor can he, who is lawfully a slave, emancipate himself by running away from one country where slavery is lawful to another where it is equally lawful. The property in the slaves still continues in the master, and the master has the same right to have it restored to him, that any native subject of our territories could have, supposing that right to be established in the mode prescribed by the local laws and regulations.[47]

While the 'Slave Trade Felony Act' pre-dates the EIC's own Regulation X of 1811, it does not seem to have been the direct cause of the latter's passing. Rather, the discussion of the Slave Trade Felony Act revolved around how existing EIC regulations would need to be reconfigured to account for it. These took place between the governments of Bengal, Madras and Bombay, beginning in 1812, and focused on whether the existing Regulation X fulfilled the terms of the Act passed by the British parliament. The simultaneous existence of these two similar acts caused considerable confusion, and it is clear that the provisions were neither generally understood nor universally enforced across the British territories. Indeed, a large proportion of EIC correspondence on slavery after 1811 related to the correct interpretation of these acts and their application. In particular, there was concern about whether they could be enforced against the subjects of other states, or whether they should be applied to the sale of slaves within EIC territories or to slaves imported without clear evidence of intent to sell. Regulation X of 1811 was thus interpreted differently in different areas and applied unevenly across India. The superintendent of police for the Upper Provinces, Mr W. Blunt, for example, reported in 1814 that there was a general belief among magistrates, police and inhabitants that it outlawed all sale or purchase of slaves, rather than just their import or export to/from foreign territories for sale. Blunt, conceiving that the Regulation was 'by no means intended … to supersede the operation of the Mohamedan Law, and to prohibit and interfere with the purchase and sale of slaves within the Companies territories', suggested that this should be explained to local officials in order to prevent the illegal apprehension and punishment of individuals.[48] There were also issues about what constituted a foreign territory—in 1814, D. Scott enquired as to whether the sale of children across the border with the newly acquired territories of Assam should be allowed, and the political agent in Pune did likewise regarding the status of the territories newly ceded from the Peshwa.[49] Letters from various colonial officials asking for clarification on the rules continued for some years after the promulgation of the

regulation, suggesting that it was not consistently applied. A circular to the effect that the regulation only applied to the import and export of slaves for sale was sent to magistrates shortly thereafter, and was supposed to clarify the rules, but actually led to further confusion.

The EIC's attempt to delineate between importation and exportation between British India and foreign states and the legitimate sale or transfer of slaves within territorial boundaries created inconsistencies and undermined the effectiveness of Regulation X as an anti-slavery measure. As Charles T. Metcalfe, then Secretary to Government in Bombay, put it in 1819, 'Independently of the general question as to tolerating the continuance of slavery, it is supposed to be very difficult to prevent the carrying off of young people by force or stealth, and other such practices, if the sale be permitted.'[50] Thus, although Regulation X of 1811 was officially considered to be effective, to the extent that the governments of Madras and Bombay were instructed to enact similar legislation (in 1812 and 1813 respectively), neither could have been entirely successful, since the government of Madras found it necessary to issue another Regulation re-enforcing the Felony Act in 1826, and the Bombay government likewise in 1827.[51]

The boundaries of colonial authority

Interventions to prevent slave-trading tested the boundaries of British moral authority and the political limits of British influence in the princely states. British relationships with the princely states were based on a system of 'subsidiary alliance', established through treaties signed in the years before 1818. Although every treaty was different and contained unique provisions relating to specific local circumstances, the basic premise was that in return for handing Britain control of their foreign relations the Indian rulers were guaranteed internal sovereignty. For the British, this system allowed them to achieve paramountcy without the expense of territorial expansion, securing their borders against external aggression by creating a 'buffer zone' around British India. For the Indian rulers, it secured them against internal and external aggression and gave them, in theory at least, complete control of the domestic policy of their states. Subsidiary alliance had a profound effect on the internal affairs of the states, however, as it changed the conditions in which the chiefs ruled by taking real power out of their hands, reducing their political and moral authority and thus lessening their capacity to run effective administrations and keep peace and order in their countries.[52] Although technically precluded from authoritative intervention in the states' domestic affairs, the British sometimes took decisions in their own interest that interfered with internal politics, transgressing the terms of their

treaties.[53] Moreover, as rulers were often bound by their treaties to accept British 'guidance' on the administration of their state, British Residents could influence the direction of internal policy through 'advice' that often had the force of a Company directive. Thus, despite the principle of non-intervention, the Resident could gain influence, if not outright authority, over every aspect of a state's administration.[54] The degree and circumstances in which this influence could be legitimately exercised were sources of considerable debate in the late 1820s and 1830s, however, with some British officials espousing a policy of total non-intervention, while others, such as Charles Metcalfe and John Malcolm, suggesting that the British should help, support and strengthen the rulers rather than 'abandon' them.[55] In practice, the British showed little hesitation in intervening if they believed a state was being 'mis-governed' or that there was a threat of instability. A Resident might regularly interfere with the appointment and dismissal of ministers, raise objections to excessive levels of taxation, protest against law and order failures or raise myriad other issues that impacted on British administration and revenue collection.[56] As a correspondent to *The Times* put it in 1841, 'We notoriously interfere on any and every question where our own interests are at stake.'[57]

Interestingly, it has been suggested that the creation of the Rajputana Agency in 1832 led to the curtailing of Residential influence over the political administration of the princely states, and that this in turn acted as a catalyst for interest in social issues such as slavery, infanticide and *sati*. Where previously the Resident might have helped the local ruler improve the administrative systems of his state, after 1832 the government increasingly disapproved of such involvement, leading some political agents to turn to social reform as a means of exerting their authority.[58] Slave-trading, infanticide and punishment by mutilation were all addressed, with varying degrees of success, in the 1820s and 1830s, while moves against *sati* were made in the 1840s and 1850s.[59] Though they still paid lip service to the policy of non-intervention, maintaining that prohibitions against various social evils had been brought about 'by friendly representation', the successful conclusion of many of these endeavours seems to have been sufficient to silence any concerns about the legality of such interference. In 1836, the Board of Directors announced that, in relation to the princely states, 'we think that you ought, whenever special reasons of great strength do not exist to the contrary, to require the abandonment of practices in direct opposition to humanity and civilisation.'[60] Many British officials assumed that Indians were incapable of independent social reform and consequently that British influence had to be exerted in the interests of humanitarian progress. As the Resident at Jodhpur put it in 1844, 'the Rajput is unprepared for some of the reforms … but if we wait for him being prepared, in the common slow course

of events, when his own advanced state of civilisation would remedy the evil, we wait forever.'[61] Such a position, though gaining in popularity in the 1840s, was controversial, however, and the Government of India was not prepared to concur with 'the necessity or expediency generally of our interfering in the detailed array of events and administration of native states under competent rulers.'[62] Although they praised Indian states that prohibited slavery,[63] they rarely sought to challenge its existence as a static institution, even after its criminalisation in British India.

Although the issue of slave-trading in the princely states had been raised by Seton in 1808, Metcalfe in 1813 and Malcolm in 1821, serious debates about how and whether to intervene in the issue did not take place until the early 1830s. At this moment increasing evangelical influence in the higher echelons of the EIC, with the Governor-Generalship of Lord William Bentinck, combined with growing emancipationist fervour in Britain to create a climate favourable to a reconsideration of the issue. The catalysts for discussion about further measures to limit slave-trading were more local, however, as a series of incidents involving British subjects prompted discussion on the subject, and in 1832 a further regulation was issued (Regulation III, 1832), which extended the provisions of Regulation X to include 'any removal of slaves, when made for the purpose of traffic, whether from foreign territories into British, or from one place to another, within any part of our own territories' and stipulated that the slaves so removed would become free.[64] Despite this renewed impetus towards ending slave-trading, the implementation of any ban still relied on the co-operation of the princely states and involved delicate questions of sovereignty and legitimate authority. Governor-General Lord William Bentinck, himself well known for his evangelical and Utilitarian sympathies, spelled out the government position in 1832:

> Divested as [I] understand this traffic to be, of all the cruel features which characterised the African trade, still there is abundant reason to justify every practicable effort that could be made for its suppression. In a cause so interesting to humanity, [I] would not hesitate to sanction any measure to which recourse could be had consistently with the preservation of good faith, but we could not interfere authoritatively to effect the discontinuance of this practice without violating the natural independence which we are pledged to uphold. Regretting … that a regard for existing treaties, whereby we are bound to refrain from interfering with the internal economy of our allies, must prevent [me] from sanctioning any proceeding on your part which could bear the appearance of dictation … yet [I] can see no objection to your availing yourself of any favourable opportunity that may occur of your pointing out, in a friendly and confidential manner, to any of the princes or chiefs to whom you are accredited, the manifold evils the traffic in slaves must entail on the

> subjects of their own and neighbouring states; the baneful and demoralising influence of such a system in any country where it prevails and the credit which would attach in the estimation of the British government to any ruler who should prohibit the traffic within his own dominations.[65]

In doing so he combined an anti-slavery rhetoric characteristic of the abolitionist campaign in Britain with the political rhetoric of non-interventionism. He went on to observe that in the case of British subjects being kidnapped stronger measures might be taken.[66]

If the Government of India was prepared to sanction 'friendly' discussion on the issue of slave-trading, the terms in which that discussion should be couched were the subject of debate. For some British officials, the destabilising impact of the trade was sufficient justification for a hard line, treaty obligations notwithstanding. R. Ross, Resident for Harauti, commented:

> It is certainly a grave question whether any effectual interference in the matter could be exerted without greatly disgusting the chiefs who employ and harbour the slave-dealers. But the conciliation of these chiefs, though a highly important and desirable object, is not a paramount duty, if, to waive all reference to their own subjects, it can be affected only by conniving at the calamities they inflict on the subjects of other states under our protection.[67]

Similarly, Mr Cavendish, Resident at Gwalior, believed that

> [if] the children of this court's subjects only were sold at these markets, we perhaps should have no right to interfere except by advice; but these markets, close to our frontier, give encouragement to all dealers … and have extended their influence far and wide, to the great injury of our subjects and our allies … with every wish to support the independence of the court and its just rights, it becomes my duty to declare my opinion that … less interference in internal matters or trifles, and more decisive and authoritative interposition in the cases above reported, and for the suppression of all frontier plunderers, have long been required and should be urgently insisted on by our government … Great Britain would not permit France to open a market for the sale of British or other children belonging to our colonies or dependent possessions; Britain would not permit France to be an asylum for pirates, or for banditti, the plunderers of our merchants; and there can be no law or even reason for permitting such negligence, connivance or apathy on the part of a government receiving at our hands daily benefits.[68]

Others advocated a more gentle approach, circumventing the problem of legitimate intervention by appealing to humanitarian considerations and invoking emotive abolitionist imagery rather than emphasising the wishes of the British government. A. Lockett, AGG for Rajputana, for example,

commented that arguing that slave-trading was 'at utter variance with the feelings of the British government' was ineffective as 'many other long established customs are objectionable on the same grounds'.[69] He suggested that the local Resident might instead have

> appealed to their own generosity and feelings of compassion on the occasion … entreated them to think of the feelings of the poor miserable parents, when deprived suddenly of their child, perhaps their only child, and of the feelings of that helpless child itself, torn by violence from its natural protectors and sold for a trifle to an utter stranger in a foreign land. He might have adverted to the disgrace and inhumanity of such a practice, to the numerous serious evils flowing from it, one of which was to demoralise, to brutalise the human heart, and having dwelt on those matters in a manner calculated to make an impression on their minds, to have concluded by entreating them to add the weight of their high characters to discontinue, and if possible abolish forever, the practice in Kotah.[70]

As the extracts above demonstrate, British discussions about intervention on the slavery issue combined moral/humanitarian rhetoric with concerns over the legitimate parameters of British authority and the social, political and economic impacts of slave-trading on their own and allied territories. The kidnapping of British subjects for sale in the princely states, with its implications of wider organised criminality, provided the British with a legitimate entry point into what was otherwise a domestic issue. In June 1832, for example, the magistrate in Agra reported that a *chumar* named Bhowany had sold his wife to a slave-dealer in Gwalior. As the local British authorities considered this a criminal offence, the magistrate asked the Resident at Gwalior, Mr Cavendish, to intervene and have her restored to her relations.[71] This case enabled Cavendish to raise the issue of slave-trading with the durbar. In July 1832, the Gwalior Akhbar reported that as there were 'a great number of slave-dealers residing in the camp, and that they enticed away women and children, young and old, and sold them openly in the camp', and that as the British were 'bent on putting a stop to such practices', the authorities had determined to end slave-dealing in Gwalior.[72] Sixty-five people, mainly women and children, were released, nine of whom were British subjects.

Events in Gwalior created a pretext for the British to address the issue of slave-trading in other Rajput and Maratha states. In the wake of the prohibition in Gwalior, the Government of India sent a circular letter to its Residents in all the Rajput states, as well as those of Indore, Hyderabad, Bundlekhund, Delhi and Saugor, requesting them to bring Gwalior's 'laudable and enlightened efforts in the cause of humanity'[73] to their various rulers' attention and to 'take every proper opportunity of explaining to the

native authorities the anxious wish of the British government that this horrific traffic should be prohibited throughout India'.[74] As a result, proclamations against slave-trading were issued in Kota, Bundi, Rewa and Nagpur, and by some minor chiefs in the Jubbalpore area, in 1833. Slave-trading was outlawed in Jaipur in 1839 and slave status abolished in 1847. Marwar outlawed slave-trading in 1844—a move which the AGG for Rajputana considered 'a fine specimen of what may be done by the judicious exercise of our influence at the court and among the natives of the country'.[75] Significantly, however, although British officials praised those Rajput states like Jaipur that prohibited it, they did not actively pursue the abolition of slavery as a domestic institution and this omission undermined efforts to suppress the land-based trade.

Prohibiting the slave trade did not automatically effect its eradication; as Lieutenant Colonel Sutherland, AGG for Rajputana, lamented in 1846, 'In several of the states the purchase and sale of children have already been declared illegal, but as native governments seldom if ever attach any specific penalty to the violation of their laws, legislation with them is not likely to be very effectual.'[76] As a result, despite initial British optimism, they were forced to revisit the issue in a number of states,[77] especially in Gwalior, where the 'shameful neglect'[78] of the 1833 orders, together with the territory's general 'disorganisation' and lawlessness, were raised with the durbar in 1841, following a series of slave-dealing cases.[79] As late as 1862, the AGG for Central India could report of Gwalior:

> the crime of kidnapping children for sale to the prostitutes of Gwalior and other cities in this state is frightfully prevalent and seems ... to be carried on the British districts north of the Chumbal as in the native states. In eighteen months, from the first of January 1861 to the 30th June 1862, five boys and fifty nine girls have been recovered from these people and returned to their parents ... All through that part of India there are organised establishments for the collection of kidnapped children and their sale in distant places ... [The] people of Gwalior do not generally consider the kidnapping of children as a serious crime.[80]

The failure of legislation against slave-trafficking meant that British officials were, at various points, drawn into slave-trading cases, as they were appealed to for the reclamation and repatriation of kidnapped slaves. As late as 1862, George Lawrence commented, 'I believe that the practice of selling children into slavery is on the decrease, but this diminution of the crime is due rather to the efforts of the several political agents who strive to repress it than to any feeling among the Rajputs that the sale and transfer of their fellow beings is opposed to humanity and justice.'[81]

Runaway slaves and proprietary rights

The difficulty with locating slave-trading within the colonial-controlled sphere of law and order, while allowing slavery to exist in a domestic space outside British authority, was that slaves moved fluidly between these spaces as they were kidnapped, transported, sold and installed in the *zenana*, or as they escaped and sought British redress. Of course, in some ways the EIC's focus on slave-trafficking reflects the typical pattern of abolitionist campaigns and anti-slavery legislation, where slave-trading is ended a generation or more before slavery itself is outlawed. Yet, unlike the Trans-atlantic system, where the institution of slavery in the Americas was supplied primarily by a specific long-distance trade in slaves from Africa, in India networks of supply and demand for slaves were more complex, with various routes into slavery existing that were often deeply imbedded in local social and political contexts. As a result the practical distinctions between slavery and slave-trading, while helping the British conceptualise the limits of their authority, created a false distinction between what Indrani Chatterjee terms the 'home' and the 'market'.[82] Moreover, the EIC did not follow their legislation against slave-trafficking with meaningful interventions against slavery itself, at the time or subsequently. While the British did interest themselves in the liberation of some slaves, their policy was inconsistent, contradictory and dependent on the point in the continuum of enslavement at which help was sought. The liberation of domestic slaves 'depended on the ability of slaves themselves to flee to protective custody' or of their relatives to come and find them.[83] In 1832, for example, A. Lockett, AGG for Rajputana, reported the case of a female child who had been kidnapped in Mewar and sold to a *subedar* (high-ranking Indian soldier) in Bundi for 125 rupees. Her father, a gardener, travelled to Kota from Mewar to petition for her return, which, after some financial wrangling, was achieved with the support of the British Resident.[84]

Although many British officials maintained that long-standing domestic slaves generally did not desire emancipation, those who had been bought or sold were deemed less acquiescent. As Mr Cavendish put it, 'the demand for children is greater than the demand for grown up people, for they recollect not, after some time, their parents or place of nativity, and are more obedient than the grown ups, who are generally on the look out for an early opportunity of running away.'[85] Thus, slave resistance in the Indian context was connected in the British mind to slave-trafficking, rather than to hereditary slave status. Such a distinction was important, as it determined the response of the British authorities to escaped slaves' claims for assistance. In 1829, the government ordered the release of female slaves who had escaped from the royal palace at Delhi, despite the King urgently demanding their restoration,

on the grounds that they had been kidnapped 'and reduced to a state of slavery by nefarious means subsequent to the date of the proclamations issued in 1811–2 forbidding the traffic in human beings within British territories' and had been ill-treated in the palace.[86] Though unwilling to return trafficked slaves like these to servitude, British officials were, however, more ambivalent when it came to long-standing domestic slaves. When faced with a case for the restitution of a runaway slave who had been hiding in a neighbouring state, Captain Lang, political agent in the Mahi Caunta, commented,

> in such a state of society as exists in this and the neighbouring districts, we are bound in both justice and expediency to interfere for the restoration of runaway slaves, who are claimed by one chief out of the jurisdiction of another, every possible precaution being taken that when surrendered they should not be harshly treated.[87]

Here, the political stability of the region, together with the woman's status as an established (rather than newly acquired) domestic slave, were more significant than any anti-slavery ideals in shaping Lang's conception of his own authority to intervene.

Shifts in accepted EIC practice with regards to restoring runaway slaves do seem to have taken place after 1833. Although, as we know, slavery was not delegalised in India until 1843, after the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies and the debate over Indian slavery during the Charter renewal EIC officials were under pressure to look into ways to ameliorate or phase out slave status in their territories. Thus, although measures actively to emancipate slaves were conspicuous by their absence, the EIC increasingly shied away from enforcing the master's rights to the extent that it had previously done. When the agent at Delhi refused to restore fugitive slave cultivators to their owners in the Gurhwal territories in 1836, his actions received the approbation of government on the grounds that it 'could not countenance slavery'. Thus, although they believed that 'the sudden discontinuance of the purchase of slaves throughout the Rajah's territories was more than could reasonably be expected of him, and more perhaps than we had a right to demand', they worried that annulling Lieutenant Colonel Young's letter would encourage the traffic, and they suggested that he simply 'continue to discountenance the traffic by refusing to deliver up fugitives, and to do all that friendly influence and advise could effect to put a stop to it'.[88] Such principles were not universally applied, however, and Chatterjee notes that even after the 'abolition' of slavery in British India in 1843, in some areas the British courts continued to be used to restore what were essentially runaway slaves to their masters or mistresses.[89]

The EIC's continued willingness to restore slaves or ex-slaves to their owners may, of course, in part reflect difficulties in knowing what to do with runaways. As early as 1817, M. Elphinstone, then Resident at Pune, commented on the problems created when slaves absconded from the Peshwa and sought protection in British encampments, asking also to be advised as to whether assistance could be afforded to British sepoys and subjects in recovering slaves who had escaped into the Peshwa's territories. 'It is so obvious', he remarked, 'that we cannot open an asylum for fugitive slaves within the Paishwa's territories, that I have hitherto directed persons in these circumstances to be refused leave to reside in our camps.'[90] The disposal of slaves who escaped or were liberated when slave-dealers were caught and prosecuted caused administrative difficulties for the British, who refused to fund homes or shelters for emancipated slaves, in British India or elsewhere.[91] This lack of provision deterred them from actively seeking to emancipate domestic slaves unless there was clear evidence of unlawful trafficking. It also left them with the conundrum of how to return rescued slaves to an Indian domestic space without actually returning them to slavery, especially as simply restoring them to their original status was not always an option. This was the case when six men were arrested and imprisoned for slave-dealing in Gwalior in 1841. Of their victims, two women, Doree and Junkoo, stated that they had lost caste by their captivity and as a result could not return to their husbands. As mature women, they were released to their own devices and the colonial archive does not record how they subsequently negotiated their new existence outside the bonds both of slavery and of marriage. Three children who were also released proved more problematic, as their parents could not be located and they were considered too young to fend for themselves. Ultimately, they were placed in the care of an Indian EIC employee, on the understanding that they would be free to leave once grown up. The government was notably unhappy with this irregular arrangement, but did not possess the structures to deal with the situation in any other way.[92] In the case of forty-three slaves freed from dealers from Nepal, Thomas Thornhill noted that while nine had asked to be sent to the nearest *ghat*, from which they would be able to return to their homes, of the others he noted that many were infants who were unable to provide information about their parents or place of residence, while several of the older ones 'express a decided disinclination to return to their homes, alleging that their parents, having sold them, will not again allow them to associate with their families.' He suggested that the Nepal government be asked to depute some of its officers to receive the care of these children, and that he would subsist them in the meantime.[93] Similarly, J. Ryley, Magistrate at Cawnpore, reported in 1813 that a woman ('a common prostitute') had brought two twelve-year-old girls with her to Cawnpore, who she acknowledged she had

bought at Jhansi for 52 and 49 rupees respectively. Ryley was unsure what to do with them as

> [the] children state that no forcible means were had recourse to, but that their parents sold them in consequence of their being reduced to extreme want, owing to a very great scarcity of grain, and that they themselves did not wish to go back to their homes, indeed, were they to be conveyed to their parents, they in all probability would not be received, but become complete outcasts, the father of one being a Jaut, and of the other a Rajpoot, the conveyance of them, therefore to their own village does not appear likely to be productive of any good whatever; and as the confinement of the woman would deprive the unfortunate girls of the only protection (such as it is) which they can now look to, I have hesitated in carrying into effect the rules laid down in Regulation X.[94]

In such circumstances, allowing children to remain in slavery seemed like a preferable option to taking them into the care of the state.

Ultimately, the British refusal to interfere with slave-holding, while they sought to put down slave-trading, created an anomalous situation where the treatment of escaped slaves was concerned. The delicacy of the situation is summed up in the following account by the AGG for Central India in 1862:

> A female slave of one of the guaranteed thakoors under this agency, who had been permitted by her master to marry a freeman of another territory, has altogether quitted her master's house in opposition to his orders and gone to reside with her husband at his home. The thakoor, having failed to recover her, applied to this office to enforce her restoration, on the express ground that she was his 'vihamazad' (house-born) slave. Of course, I declined to comply with the request and took the opportunity of pointing out that while we had no desire to interfere with the domestic arrangement of any thakoor, no British officers could directly or indirectly countenance or authorise attempts at the forcible recovery of household or other servants on such grounds. The thakoor in reply stated that if such was the case the institution could not be maintained and that the result must be the breaking up of households, in which it had existed from ancient times and which were in every way dependent on it, for the slaves would in many cases refuse to remain in their present condition if they believed it was optional for them to do so, or to claim their freedom if they pleased. I mention this occurrence to show what a delicate matter it is to interfere in, and what caution is required in dealing with so universal a practice, one, moreover that so tenderly affects the whole of the influential classes of these territories.[95]

Conclusion

British attempts to delineate between slave-holding as a domestic issue and slave-trading as a political issue of law and order constructed an artificial dichotomy in what was a fluid continuum of social practice. As a result, though they did attempt to put down the coercive internal trade, their policy was often inconsistent and contradictory, relying on contrived distinctions between different routes into slavery and different types of bondage. Because the authority of the colonial state was limited spatially and ideologically, the British could only intervene with parts of the network of supply and demand, as the slaves involved moved between the Indian sphere of the *zenana* and the British sphere of jurisprudence. When the trade intersected areas of British territorial jurisdiction and impacted on issues of stability and law and order for the colonial state, British officials were willing to interfere, but they were often unable or unwilling to follow this intervention into the domestic sphere of the home, making their involvement ultimately ineffective. As a result, their treatment of and control over the movement of slaves was at best a patchwork of points of authority. As the Magistrate for Agra put it, 'Our courts have indeed eradicated the open purchase of slaves and slavery in these parts, but when the customs that gave rise to them are in full force in neighbouring independent states and the system is permitted, nay authorised, by the supreme power, no vigilance of the judicial authorities can check its influence.'[96] These debates incorporated pragmatic concerns about stability and law and order, moral interpretations of the nature of slavery and slave-trading and political concerns about the acceptable limits of British interference with the internal affairs of sovereign states. Here, as Radhika Singha points out, 'the Company's legal claims over the person of its subjects constituted a crucial terrain for the redefinition of sovereign right.'[97] Slaves, as they moved through the networks of acquisition, transaction and ownership, shifted in and out of spaces of British authority. Their ability to access the anti-slavery sentiments of the colonial state in order to secure their own freedom depended very much on their location within this spatial and conceptual framework rather than on any overarching moral and political commitment by the British to ending human bondage.

Notes

1 Indrani Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in the Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 143.
2 Ibid.
3 Prosecutions for kidnapping children took place in various parts of British India in the 1810s and 1820s, including cases in Bundlekhund and Assam in 1823. See *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), p. 376.
4 Parliamentary Papers, session 1837–8 (215), vol. XLVIII (henceforth PP 1837–8), pp. 55–6.
5 Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 157.
6 As Kasturi puts it 'the British viewed as dangerous the potentially centrifugal tendencies of a political culture in which the geographical and social orientation of caste and kinship overlapped with and contradicted fluid territorial boundaries.' Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 67.
7 PP 1828, p. 414.
8 PP 1837–8, p. 9.
9 National Archives of India, Delhi, Foreign Department Records, Political (henceforth FDR-P), 1830, Magistrate Agra to Commissioner Agra, 9 Nov. 1829.
10 Ibid.
11 PP 1828, p. 300.
12 Ibid., p. 248.
13 PP 1837–8, p. 62.
14 For more on *thuggee*, see Tom Lloyd, 'Thuggee, Marginality and the State Effect in Colonial India, circa 1770–1840', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 45.2 (2008): 201–37; Radhika Singha, 'Providential Circumstances: The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation', *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993): 83–146; Kim A. Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
15 William Sleeman, *A Report on the System of Megpunnaism, or the Murder of Indigent Parents for Their Young Children ... As It Prevails in the Delhie Territories, etc.* (Serampore: s.n. 1839). For a case of slave-trading via kidnap and murder in Gwalior, see FDR-P, 52–4, 17 Jan. 1842.
16 For the conflation between Banjarras, slave-dealing and child-stealing, see FDR-P, 7–8, Oct. 1862, Meade to Govt India, 15 Sept. 1862. Several decades earlier, Malcolm noted that 'It is a remarkable fact, and one of the few creditable to the late community of the Pindarries, that among the numerous prisoners of all ages and sexes whom they took, though they employed them as servants, gave them to their chiefs and accepted ransoms for them from their relations, they never sold them into bondage, nor carried on, like the Binjarries, a traffic in slaves.' PP 1828, p. 415.
17 PP 1828, p. 414.
18 Radhika Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic: Criminal Law and the "Head of the Household", 1772–1843', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 33.3 (1996): 317.
19 FDR-P, 1830, Magistrate Agra to Commissioner Agra, 9 Nov. 1829.
20 FDR-P, 52–4, 17 Jan. 1842, Ellis to Spiers, 4 Oct. 1841.

21 Singha, 'Providential Circumstances', p. 142.
22 PP 1828, p. 266.
23 Ibid., p. 98.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., pp. 38–9.
26 Ibid., p. 128.
27 Ibid., p. 129.
28 Ibid., p. 128.
29 Ibid., Regulation 10 of 1811, p. 99.
30 Ibid., p. 101.
31 Ibid., p. 110.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 107.
34 Ibid., p. 217.
35 Ibid., p. 335.
36 H. R. C. Wright, 'Raffles and the Slave Trade at Batavia in 1812', *Historical Journal* 3.2 (1960): 184–91.
37 PP 1828, p. 216.
38 Nancy Gardner Cassels, 'Social Legislation under the Company Raj: The Abolition of Slavery Act V 1843', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 11.1 (1988): 66.
39 PP 1828, p. 136.
40 Ibid., p. 217.
41 Ibid., pp. 561–2.
42 Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 183.
43 Cassels, 'Social Legislation', p. 10.
44 PP 1828, p. 327.
45 Ibid., p. 326.
46 Ibid., p. 329.
47 Ibid., p. 326.
48 Ibid., p. 324.
49 Ibid., pp. 376–7, 330.
50 Ibid., p. 340.
51 Cassels, 'Social Legislation', p. 10.
52 Urmila Walia, *Changing British Attitudes Towards the Indian States, 1823–35* (New Delhi: Capital Publishers & Distributors, 1985), p. 60.
53 Ibid., p. 58.
54 Adrian Sever, *Documents and Speeches on the Indian Princely States* (New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1985), p. 7.
55 As Robin Jeffery points out, policy towards the Indian states in general rarely followed a uniform pattern: 'to lay down an all India policy proved impossible. The states were too many and too diverse … Various rivalries, interests and ideas had to be incorporated and along with any policy directive that the British might have to a specific state at a specific time.' Robin Jeffrey, *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States* (Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 8.
56 Walia, *Changing British Attitudes*, p. 58.
57 *The Times* (10 Dec. 1841).
58 Vijay Kumar Vashishtha, *Rajputana Agency, 1832–1858: A Study of British Relations with the States of Rajputana during the Period with Special Emphasis on the Role of Rajputana Agency* (Jaipur: Aalekh, 1978), pp. 231–34.

59 For more on the British campaign against *sati* in princely India, see Andrea Major, *Sovereignty and Social Reform: Colonialism and the Campaign against Sati in India, 1830–1860* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).
60 India Office Records, British Library, London, India Dispatches, Political, 8, 30 Mar. 1836.
61 India Office Records, British Library, London, Board's Collection (henceforth BC) 105651, 1847, F/4/2176, French to Thoresby, 23 Sept. 1844
62 BC 105651, 1847, F/4/2176, Govt India to Thoresby 1 Feb. 1845.
63 See, for example, FDR-P, 105–7, 17 Mar. 1848, where the Resident at Indore lists the states in Central India that had suppressed suttee, infanticide and slavery. Also, BC 117065, 1849, F/4/2281, Affairs of Jaipur, where the Jaipur Durbar is praised for prohibiting slavery and the use of terms *gola* and *golee* denoting slaves, for domestic servants.
64 PP 1837–8, p. 37.
65 Ibid., p. 56.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 62.
69 Ibid., p. 57.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., p. 58.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., p. 60.
74 Ibid., p. 61.
75 BC 107684, 1847, F/4/2194, Sutherland to Greathed, 24 May 1846.
76 BC 111331, 1848, F/4/2229, Sutherland to Govt, 6 May 1846.
77 In Bundi, for example, the 1833 prohibition, which was 'continually evaded and had in fact become obsolete', was reissued in 1849. BC 119683, 1849, F/4/2312, Burton to Sutherland, 10 May 1848.
78 FDR-P, 52–4, 17 Jan 1842, Spiers to Govt India, 24 Dec. 1841.
79 Ibid., 17 Jan 1842, Spiers to Ellis, 15 Oct. 1841.
80 FDR-P, 7–8, Oct. 1862, Meade to Govt India, 15 Sept. 1862.
81 FDR-P, 51–3, Feb. 1862, Lawrence to Govt India, 20 Jan. 1862.
82 Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', p. 159.
83 Ibid.
84 PP 1837–8, pp. 56–7.
85 Ibid., p. 60.
86 Ibid., p. 9.
87 FDR-P, 7–8, Oct. 1862, Lang to Sutherland, 18 Jan. 1840.
88 PP 1837–8, p. 17.
89 Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', p. 153.
90 PP 1828, p. 332.
91 Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', p. 155.
92 FDR-P, 52–4, 17 Jan. 1842, var. letters.
93 PP 1828, p. 128.
94 Ibid.
95 FDR-P, 7–8, Oct. 1862, Meade to Govt India, 15 Sept. 1862.
96 FDR-P, 1830, Magistrate Agra to Commissioner Agra, 9 Nov. 1829.
97 Singha, 'Making the Domestic More Domestic', p. 311.

6

'Slaves of the Soil': Caste and Agricultural Slavery in South India

In 1811, Thomas Baber, magistrate for North Malabar, uncovered an 'inhuman traffic' in slaves between the princely state of Travancore and the EIC territories in Malabar. This trade, he reported, involved the kidnapping of 'free-born children … of the superior castes', who were 'stolen from their relations in the night-time, cloths thrust in their mouths, and in this state carried to Aleppi'. From 'Aleppi' (Alappuzha), 'Moplah' (*mapilla*—a Kerala Muslim community) merchants took the children by boat to Mahe, before selling them on. The most shocking feature of the incident, however, was that nine children were discovered in the house of Wallapagata Assen Ally, the confidential servant of Mr Murdoch Brown, British owner of the Randaterra plantation at Anjarakandy. On questioning the children, a high-caste boy named Coon Yangaree told Baber that his brother Nestha and three other kidnapped children had already been sent to Anjarakandy. As 'not even bondsmen, much less free-born children, could under the existing laws of Travancore be legally sold and sent out of that country', and as the British proprietor of Randaterra was also subject to metropolitan laws against slave-trading, Baber determined to recover the four children, together with any others who might be found 'under similar unhappy circumstances'. With that in mind, he sent several Indian officials to Randaterra to investigate the nature of the plantation's workforce, and asked Brown to provide a list of any recently purchased slaves, together with the names of the people from whom he had acquired them. In reply, Mr Brown informed Baber that he had 'purchased many Pooliar families, and some even very lately', but insisted that he had done so 'under the sanction of government'—referring to the permission granted him by Jonathan Duncan, Governor of Bombay, to purchase 'Pooliar' (*pulaya*, a so-called slave caste) slaves in 1798. Baber's officials removed seventy-six people from the Randaterra plantation who claimed to have been forcibly taken from their homes in South Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. This number included ten infants and six 'free-born'

children, who had apparently been 'stolen from their friends' and sent by sea to Anjarakandy, where they had been enslaved and made to associate with and 'eat the food of Pooliars'.[1]

Anjarakandy plantation was set up by the EIC in 1797 in the Malabar district, then part of Bombay Presidency. Initially a speculative enterprise, it experimented with the production of pepper, cotton, coffee and indigo (but not sugar) under the management of overseer Murdoch Brown. Brown, a Scotsman of considerable enterprise, had a chequered past, including a period spent as a smuggler and arms dealer in Mahe, whence it was rumoured he had supplied Tipu Sultan's forces with provisions. This history made him a controversial figure, but did not prevent him cementing his power on the plantation and his influence in the local area by successfully lobbying to be made a local magistrate and revenue collector.[2] He eventually acquired Randaterra in his own right when the district passed from the Bombay to the Madras government, and subsequently used his substantial local authority to bolster and extend his activities on the plantation, which grew from 200 to 3,000 acres over the ensuing years. Most of this expansion was at the expense of local people, whose property he usurped and who regarded the Anjarakandy regime as extremely oppressive. This hostility was manifested during the Pahzassi revolts in 1797, when the plantation became the target of local ire and all plants and trees were systematically destroyed.[3]

Brown's acknowledged use of slaves on the Randaterra plantation, though unusual, provides an insight into both the labour problems faced by commercial agricultural enterprise in early colonial India and British perceptions of the social and structural dynamics of agrarian society. Although India did not suffer from the extreme labour shortages that provided the context for industrial-scale agricultural slavery in the New World, recent studies of pre-colonial and early colonial labour conditions contest the idea of a superabundance of labour, offering a more complex picture of the functioning of supply and demand in the early colonial Indian labour market. David Washbrook, among others, has highlighted the problems the colonial state faced when 'organizing the production and marketing of high value crops, from which both the government and its various commercial partners took profit'.[4] Labour supply, he argues, was a key concern, as not only did the land to man ratio vary enormously across India, but the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also saw periods of demographic crisis, caused by devastating wars and famines, even in more prosperous areas. The struggle between the EIC and Mysore, for example, had serious effects on South India, with coastal Andhra Pradesh seeing the productive capacity of many estates decline by four-fifths during the 1790s.[5] Thus, although in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a pool of mostly low caste labourers without rights in land, there were

also periodic labour scarcities that affected Indian and European employers alike. Ravi Ahuja argues that 'the usual prevalence of labour scarcity was … a strong incentive for employers to keep labourers in permanent bondage, notwithstanding the risk of considerable loss in times of drought and dearth when the demand for labour dropped',[6] while Michael Anderson notes the frequent bitter European complaints about wage demands, unwillingness to work and specific labour shortages.[7] Certainly, Murdoch Brown found suitable local labour for Randaterra plantation hard to come by, and in 1798 he wrote to the Commissioners for Malabar complaining that the local *tehsildar* (salaried native revenue officer) had been unable to provide him with a sufficient number of day labourers. Those who did come, he grumbled, arrived late in the morning and refused to stay on the plantation overnight, meaning that they worked only restricted hours, during the hottest part of the day, and were proving impossible to fashion into the productive labour force he required. As a result, Brown reported, he had purchased 'according to the custom of the country' about forty-five *pulayas*—men, women and children—who he found 'very useful'. Although he admitted that four of these had recently absconded, he intended to purchase a large number more, running into the hundreds, as he found them 'by far the fittest and best people for the plantation, who, once being settled on it, will remain there, and all their posterity be, according to the rules of their caste, bred up in the same occupation as their progenitors'.[8]

Initially, the Commissioners were dubious about the legitimacy of this arrangement, given the EIC's own legislation against slave-trafficking. They were, they said, 'well persuaded, under your superintendence, that none of the evils could arise which the first Malabar Commissioner's proclamation, prohibiting the trade of slaves, is well calculated to prevent', but they were concerned that Brown's use of slaves might encourage an unauthorised traffic, by prompting 'the vicious part of the community to plunder from the weaker class of ryots [peasants]'. Such an outcome, they argued, was clearly undesirable, although they were primarily concerned not with the humanitarian dimension of such a trade, but about the infringement of local property rights and agricultural relations that it might entail. 'A distressing loss', they suggested, 'will be felt by those who may remain ignorant where the cultivators of their estates may be taken to.' The most important objection, however, was not the impact on the slaves themselves, or their dispossessed owners, but the problems that the plantation itself might experience. Stolen slaves, unwittingly employed, would have to be returned to their owners, subjecting it to 'an irretrievable loss when the renter is not to be found to refund the purchase money'. In the context of the deep social disorder caused by forty years of fighting and relentless revenue extraction during the wars against Tipu Sultan, and given the confused state of the

registers of land rights and revenue liabilities,[9] they concluded that 'this mode of procuring labourers, especially in the present state of the country, is impolitic'. As a result, they refused to authorise any further purchases of *pulayas* until they had received instructions from government.[10]

Brown was not willing to give up his plan easily and wrote a detailed letter in response to the Commissioners' concerns, in which he maintained that

> [no] person has a greater repugnance to the traffic of human beings as slaves, than myself, neither am I ignorant of the orders that were issued … as far as regards the natives being sold to and exported by the Europeans, Arabs or others; but these orders were not, as far as I can judge, meant to interfere with the ancient established customs and rights of the natives amongst themselves. The Hindoo laws and religion have fixed the stations, occupations and rank of the different classes of mankind, beyond the power of man to alter, excepting by their total ejection from the community.

By these laws, he maintained, various castes were

> born slaves, the property of a superior, who is authorised by the laws of Malabar to dispose of his right in favour of another person, so that the sale of them is as common as a bond; nor are the sales confined to the Hindoos one amongst another, but are equally common between them and the Moplahs; the Pooliar, then, born in a state of bondage, must remain so, as well as his posterity; for I never heard any example of manumission, neither do I believe, that agreeable to the Hindoo system, it is in the power of those to whom they belong, to in any way alter their position in society, the caste I have mentioned, being therefore condemned without alternative to cultivate the earth for the benefit of others. I concluded, that by acquiring them in the mode authorised by the customs of the country, and transferring their labour to the Company, from those who were willing to dispose of it, I was likely to better their situation and to render a very essential service to my employers, by assembling on the plantation, labourers who will be forever fixed there, and who by being taught and constantly employed, each in their separate branches, will do more labour and better than double the number of daily hired men, for even the simple labours of agriculture require to be practised before they can be executed with precision and celerity.[11]

It was an argument that found favour with the higher echelons of government, and on 31 July 1798 the Governor of Bombay, Jonathan Duncan, gave his approval to Brown's purchase of *pulayas*, on the grounds that it did not contravene existing regulations for the province. In light of this, the Commissioners revised their opinion and informed Brown that they had 'no hesitation in authorising you to continue your endeavours to procure as many of these people as you may require for the use of the plantation'.[12]

Brown, as a result, manned his plantation through the purchase and use of slave labour for the next decade and more.

Although Brown justified his use of slave labour as consistent with local custom, large-scale slave-holding at Anjarakandy had more in common with the Atlantic plantation system than with local Indian practice. Of course, as Ahuja points out, 'the emergence of both agrestic slavery and 'wage labour' was … connected to the commodification of agricultural production in which the organic unity of land and labour was gradually eroded', as the privatisation of land rights helped to foster labour relations compatible with these new forms of property.[13] Despite this, *zamindars* usually rented out excess lands and any 'home farms' tended to be relatively small.[14] Francis Buchanan, writing of South Indian agricultural conditions at the turn of the nineteenth century, estimated that five families of slaves, amounting to about twenty-four persons of all ages, were needed to cultivate about thirty-five acres of rice land, together with five ploughs and ten oxen. He believed that a farmer with such assets was 'reckoned a substantial man', and would hire a servant to superintend his slaves. Status was performed precisely through the avoidance of agricultural labour; as Buchanan remarked of the *zamindar*, 'All the morning he sits in his house, washes his head, and prays; then eats his dinner quietly at home, and once a day takes a walk round his farm, and gives his orders.'[15] There are only two recorded instances of Indian landlords owning large numbers of slaves: in 1799, a landowner in Chingleput (Chengalpattu) had 400 slaves, while in 1835–6 it was reported that a landholder in Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli) had 500 slaves. In both these cases, however, the majority of these slaves were let out to other landholders, for want of sufficient land for them to cultivate.[16] Thus, although there were many relatively prosperous farmers with holdings big enough to need between five and fifty bondsmen, or hired labourers, plantation labour on the scale envisioned by Brown, who optimistically spoke of eventually getting 2,000 labourers, and who had 350 at the time of Baber's raid, was almost unheard of.

Although Brown claimed he was tapping into local networks and accepted only voluntary transfers of slaves from those who wished to dispose of them, it is clear that the sort of capitalist enterprise he was engaged in utilised slaves in a different way, and on a different scale, than was the norm in South Indian society. If testimonies gathered by Baber's officials are to be believed, his slaves were also acquired in dubious ways that deviated from 'acceptable' local practice. Indeed, the Commissioners' initial reservations about the ramifications of creating a demand for slaves on the plantation appear to have been well founded, as Brown's recruitment strategy, or that of his middle men, relied on stealing existing slaves, or kidnapping and enslaving vulnerable children from other castes. When questioned, some slaves found

on the plantation claimed to have been forcibly taken from their homes as long as ten or twelve years ago, leaving behind family members who did not know what had happened to them, or where they had been taken. Baber specifically noted two instances of women (Ponama and Corumbee) and their children who had been 'torn from their husbands and parents, and had never seen or heard of them since'. There were, apparently, several other similar cases.[17] Of course, some of the slaves who believed they had been kidnapped may have been knowingly sold, without their consent, by their relatives or owners, while others may have refashioned their stories in line with what they thought sympathetic colonial officials wanted to hear. As in other parts of India, in periods of war, famine or instability, when living standards dropped dramatically, women were sometimes sold, together with their children, as a *kottadumai*, or 'bunch of slaves'.[18] Yet the trade to Anajarakandy was carried on consistently, over more than a decade, and involved the movement of significant numbers of people. Assen Ally himself acknowledged that no fewer than 400 children had been transported to Malabar during the time he was at Aleppi in 1811. Baber strongly contested the suggestion that Brown's use of slave labour was a natural extension of local custom, blaming the 'oppressive and cruel practice, not only of selling slaves off the estate where they were born and bred, but actually of separating husbands and wives, parents and children, and thus severing all the nearest and dearest associations and ties of our common nature' specifically on the permission given to Brown by the colonial state 'to purchase indiscriminately as many slaves as he might require to enable him to carry on the works of that plantation'.[19]

Conditions on the plantation were also questionable. Brown maintained that his slaves were well treated, that they had experienced no change in their condition by coming to Randaterra 'excepting for the better', and that they now received the same pay as other workmen, as well as 'many indulgences that other workmen have not'.[20] At least two of the slaves questioned complained of having been whipped, however, maintaining that they had received twenty-five and twenty-four lashes respectively. Two decades later, when giving evidence on slavery in India to the British parliament, Baber described the brutal conditions he believed had prevailed on the plantation:

> slaves are subject to the lash, as also to imprisonment, putting in stocks and chaining. Repeatedly I myself have observed on their persons marks and scars from stripes inflicted by the rattan, and even wounds … of severe flogging [and] one of them in particular upon whose back and shoulders were several deep sores, and the flesh of their legs much lacerated.[21]

Such claims must be read with caution given Baber's personal animosity

towards Brown, but they are not unsubstantiated; in May 1810, the Governor of Madras had noted complaints about conditions at Randaterra, and ordered that the 'misconduct of Mr Brown (in inflicting severe punishments on some of his slaves) be prosecuted to such legal issue as may be proper'. On this occasion it was suggested that slaves with complaints against their master should be referred to the magistrate, although given the corruption that was rife throughout the EIC's judicial system, and Brown's own local influence, such prescriptions appear to have been at best naive, and simply underline the futility of slaves' recourse to the courts.[22] As Baber put it,

> there is a local … powerful obstacle to defer individuals from prosecuting Mr. Brown, or any one of that party, before the provincial court; but though the Travancorians may not be aware of this bias in favour of individuals, if they do chance to hear where their children and slaves are, they will also hear the protection that has been given to Mr. Brown, by the provincial court, in these unlawful acquisitions.[23]

The original official sanction of the Bombay authorities, he believed, was reinforced by the tacit support that the slave trade received at a local level, by a provincial court that was heavily biased in favour of Brown. Under these circumstances, he considered it 'hardly likely' that mistreated slaves or the families of kidnapped individuals 'would have the courage to come before a British court of justice in the character of a prosecutor of a European in Malabar'.[24]

If Brown's efforts to deflect Baber's inquiries demonstrate the degree of influence he wielded at a local level, they also reveal the ways in which specific colonial constructions of local labour practice could be used to justify the use of slaves. In a petition to the provincial courts, Brown claimed that the detention of his servants was unlawful because 'the major part of the children were born on his plantation, bred up and taught different useful occupations, at his expense'. Baber had acted illegally in 'seizing' them, there being 'no regulation existing to authorise this oppressive interference with my property … excepting a formal complaint against the persons themselves, or a claim being made by some person to them in consequence of some invalidity in the sale.' The sale of slaves, he noted, was 'not only authorised by the custom of Malabar, but was expressly permitted by the Mahomedan laws, under which this country was governed.' The Provincial Court of Circuit backed Brown's position, stating that he was the slaves' 'present and only ostensible proprietor' and imposing considerable obstacles in the progress of Baber's enquiry.[25] Other colonial officials were more supportive of Baber, however. Colonel J. Munro, Resident for Travancore, wrote late in 1812 to thank him for his activities, noting,

> I have every reason to believe that many of the unfortunate persons purchased by Assen Ally were procured in the most fraudulent and cruel manner, about the time when he was carrying on his proceedings at Allisrey. I received numerous complaints of the disappearance of children; but all my enquiries at the time could not develop the causes of them. I have been subsequently too much occupied by other important matters to be able to enter so fully into an investigation of this subject as I was desirous of doing, but I trust that on my arrival at Allisrey I shall have an opportunity of obtaining further information regarding it. I cannot deny myself the gratification upon this occasion of returning thanks to you in the name of many families in Travancore for your zealous and indefatigable exertions in restoring so many children to their parents and homes, and in checking a practice of a most cruel nature.[26]

The confrontation between Baber and Brown was ultimately taken to the highest levels of government, with the right of Britons in India to hold slaves finally being adjudicated by the Advocate General. Although it produced reams of correspondence, it is perhaps as indicative of the fraught relationship between these two men as it is of the actual state of slavery in Malabar. Murdoch Brown was an unsavoury figure with an insalubrious past, and his relationship with Baber was acrimonious at best, even before the events of 1811. In the published version of his report to parliament on the state of slavery in South India, produced in 1833, Baber referred to those 'scurrilous productions from Messrs. Douglas, Brown, and Gahagan', who he described as 'Conspirators against my life, or what is more valuable, my honour'.[27] The pronouncements of both men need to be considered in the context of this long-running animosity, yet the case of Anjarakandy, and the terms in which its labour arrangements were contested, is revealing. Anjarakandy was the only large-scale British plantation in southern India on which the slaves were openly used. The arguments made to justify coercive labour practices there are significant in foreshadowing the shift to indentured labour from the 1830s, while the complicity of the EIC authorities at the highest level provides a foil to the apparently abolitionist regulations of the late eighteenth century; Duncan himself promulgated Cornwallis's regulation of 1789, but less than a decade latter approved the purchase and use of slaves on Brown's plantation.[28] Such a contradiction may be indicative of the real purpose of colonial law, which, as David Washbrook argues, was not to protect the private rights of subjects, but rather to provide 'a range of secondary services for the Company, both as "state" and as "shield" for European business interests, which helped to translate political power into money.'[29]

Significantly, like the earlier European trade in slaves from India, and the use of slaves in eighteenth-century European households, the EIC's

experiment with slave labour at Anjarakandy has largely been written out of the historiography. Benedicte Hjejle's detailed study of agricultural bondage in South India does not mention it, although it does deal with indentured plantation labour in the period after 1843.[30] Paul Baak and Dick Kooiman touch on it briefly, but neither fully explores the implications of this episode for our understanding of the development of EIC labour policy or attitudes to social and agrarian relations in South India. Yet although the Anjarakandy episode was unusual, the distinctions made during this debate between slaves of different castes and backgrounds, their routes into slavery on the plantation and their status once there are indicative of EIC attitudes towards 'traditional' forms of labour servitude in the region. They suggest how the EIC and its representatives appropriated and distorted local customs in their interpretation and utilisation of agricultural labour. This chapter thus uses the debate over slavery at Anjarakandy as a starting point to explore colonial conceptions of caste within South Indian agricultural relations, and how these were adapted as anti-slavery sentiment was juxtaposed against the imperatives of stable revenue collection and an emerging plantation economy that needed a reliable supply of labour.

Agricultural slavery, caste and society in South India

In a letter of 1834 directing the attention of the Governor-General to the amelioration of slavery in India, the Court of Directors noted:

> Of the two kinds of slavery, predial and domestic, there is not a great deal of the former. It exists mostly on the Malabar Coast and the new territories on our north-east frontier, and there it would appear, the cause of greatest hardship is found, though the vague information that we possess leaves the state of the evil in no small uncertainty.[31]

This assessment was not entirely accurate, of course. Various forms of agricultural slavery and bonded labour existed in diverse parts of north and South India. Richardson, Magistrate for Bundlekhund, for example, noted in 1808 that 'there are districts under the Company's dominions wherein, to my own knowledge (particularly Ramghur), the greatest part of the cultivators and labourers are slaves', adding

> I have no scruple to avow I deem this one great cause of the wild and uncultivated condition of the country, and the barbarous and savage state of its inhabitants; for what human being will labour with good will, or a desire of improvement, when another man enjoys the sole produce? The increase of cultivation and abundance of grain &c. make no alteration in the miserable state of these unhappy wretches. If ever so much is reaped from their labour,

> they gain no advantage. A rag of the coarsest texture, scarcely sufficient to cover their nakedness, and a scanty allowance of the most cheap and unpalatable food, is their uniform portion.[32]

'Bonded labourers' were found in several regions: the *kamias* of Bihar have been studied in great detail by Gyan Prakash, the *dublas* of Gujerat are the focus of Jan Breman's work, while the *domes* were slave cultivators in the Gurhwal district near Delhi.[33] While colonial officials did not deem these groups to be slaves in the purest sense of the word, nor did they consider them to be entirely free. Despite the existence of 'slave-like' practices across India, however, colonial concern with agricultural slavery was primarily focused on the south, and in particular on the Malabar Coast. Yet even here the Court of Directors' statement is misleading, for their comment that 'the vague information that we possess leaves the state of the evil in no small uncertainty' implies a lack of knowledge, when in fact a number of reports, of varying quality, had been compiled on this very institution during the preceding decades. While historians may now question the accuracy of some of these colonial accounts, there is no doubt that the Court of Directors was supplied with them. Moreover, a decade earlier, in 1824, the Court of Directors viewed this very vagueness as a positive merit of the existing system. In a letter to the Governor of Madras on the subject, they noted that 'the rights and obligations of master and slave appear to be very indistinctly defined' and that 'this obscurity of the law' was favourable to the slaves, because whatever the legal powers the masters might possess their actual control over their slaves was limited by local usage and custom. They even asked the Governor, Sir Thomas Munro, to be 'extremely cautious in making any regulation for defining the relations of master and slave', adding, 'It is our wish to improve the condition of the latter to the utmost extent, and we fear, that in defining the power of masters, acts of compulsion might be legalised, which by custom are not now tolerated, and the slaves might be placed in a worse condition than before.'[34] Munro concurred with this advice, which gave him the authority to overrule recent suggestions for the amelioration of the condition of slaves in the Madras Presidency and to maintain the status quo.

The letter from the Court of Directors and Munro's reply related to an investigation into the state of slavery in South India instituted by the Board of Revenue in 1819, and to a more recent survey of conditions in Malabar carried out by the collector, Mr Graeme, in 1822. These accounts detailed the perceived status of slavery in the region, which was deemed, if not always mild, then at least not sufficiently intolerable as to require immediate action. Both reports, however, also included some suggestions for measures to ameliorate the existential conditions of the slaves and eventually effect their

gradual emancipation. That even these very modest reforms were overruled by the Governor and Court of Directors underlines the extent to which anti-slavery sentiment, though shaping the identity of the British colonial official in India in ideological terms, was very far from a defining feature of the colonial state in early nineteenth-century India. As had been the case with domestic slavery and slave-trafficking, the anti-slavery rhetoric of colonial officials was underpinned by political pragmatism. The extent or limits of the EIC intervention rested on the perceived benefits to their rule, as well as the perceived risks to social, political or economic stability, rather than humanitarian assessments of actual conditions. Rather than the kidnapping and trafficking of slaves over territorial borders, and associated worries about instability, criminality and the integrity of the state, in the case of predial slavery it was issues relating to the maintenance and stability of cultivation and revenue collection that took precedence—issues that eventually intersected with the labour needs of the emerging plantation system. This chapter will argue that in the context of growing colonial need to acquire and control labour for its agricultural enterprises, 'slavery' in South India was configured as being primarily caste based, static and hereditary—characteristics that not only provided a rationale for non-interference but which also allowed it later to be usefully juxtaposed against 'indenture', which, despite its many coercive features and increasingly draconian legislation, was deemed mobile and based on free contract.

As Washbrook argues, modernising land relations in India was not necessarily a function of EIC rule, whatever they might declare. The Company state, for all its progressive rhetoric, was not 'a revolutionary "liberating" government' but rather 'a continuity of the "ancien régime"', under which existing institutions were 'made more efficient, brutalized and bastardized but, significantly, not dissolved'.[35] Thus, although the Permanent Settlement purportedly envisioned a society based on a free market in all commodities, the EIC was not in practice committed to creating or sustaining such an economy. Both its maintenance of pre-colonial revenue systems and its use of personal law, which often limited 'free activity' by 'prescribing the moral and community obligations to which the individual was subject', suggest that radical reform of existing structures was not a key concern.[36] Discussions over Indian slavery must thus be understood within the context of conflicting colonial imperatives that simultaneously espoused the subordination of Indian 'status' to British 'contract', and maintained this 'status' through the defence of 'traditional' caste, religious and familial structures. 'Strangely, this paradox seems not to have been grasped by the official mind of the early raj,' Washbrook remarks, 'There appears no awareness of a contradiction between the two parts of the law and no

concern that rigid Hindu social tradition might stand in the way of free market economic enterprise.'[37]

These contradictions were writ large in colonial debates on Indian agricultural slavery, where ideas about free labour and social and spatial mobility, which supposedly characterised the enlightened anti-slavery ideology of progressive and civilised men, were juxtaposed against deference to supposedly static and immutable 'traditional' systems such as caste. Domestic slavery, because of its perceived personal and unproductive nature, was relatively easy to relegate to the private sphere, beyond the supposed modernising aspirations of the state in the public realm. The influence of personal law was not confined to the family, however, as social structures—and especially the caste system—could impact on both property rights and the market economy, especially when individuals or communities were denied access to land, or economic mobility, on the basis of local custom.[38] As a result, agricultural slavery provided a site where the conflicting imperatives of anti-slavery ideology, the political economy of capitalist production, private property rights, and traditional hierarchies and statuses collided. Slavery, when designated as such, was anathema to the free-market, free-labour economy that colonial officials publicly espoused, yet such forms of bonded labour were also deeply embedded in the local practices and traditions they were bound to uphold. Underpinning all this, and ensuring that policy decisions would be made on the basis of the latter consideration, rather than in favour of radical experimentation with the former, was the pragmatic concern with stable, efficient and profitable agricultural production and revenue collection, resulting in the emergence of a specific image of Indian agricultural slavery in the 1810s and 1820s.

Although clearly motivated by anti-slavery sentiment, as well as a degree of personal animosity towards Brown, Baber's treatment of the slave trade to Anjarakandy reflects a number of assumptions that were beginning to structure EIC thinking about the nature of agrarian relationships in South India. In particular, the idea that there were specific slave castes, which could be distinguished from the 'free-born' sections of the population, was fundamental to the way in which British colonial officials imagined South Indian society. In writing to the Resident of Travancore, Baber emphasised that not only had the slaves at Anjarakandy been acquired illegitimately but 'many of the unfortunate objects are children of Nairs, Teans and other castes, which never have at any period of the natural government of the country been considered in the light of slaves.'[39] Moreover, when sending officials to the plantation, Baber specifically told them to remove any slaves who were 'free born', as well as any of the slave castes who claimed to have been taken by force. Legitimately acquired slaves of the *pulaya* caste, however, were to be left alone. In the case of *pulaya* slaves who had been kidnapped, Baber

argued that they should be restored to their original proprietors, but felt that there could be 'no objection' to Brown employing them while he referred the case to government. Thus, 'stolen' *pulayas* were returned to the plantation, while stolen 'free-born' children remained with the magistrate.

Baber was not the first to make the distinction between 'slave' and 'free' castes, of course, nor to base policy decisions upon it. As early as the seventeenth century, European travellers in India were pointing to the degraded condition of the so-called 'untouchables' in South India and likening their condition to slavery. Spanish Friar Domingo Fernández de Navarrette, for example, noted that the Pariahs were 'the most miserable people in the world; the greatest affront is to call them Pariah, which is worse than among us dog, or base slave'.[40] More recently, the French Catholic missionary, the Abbé Dubois, whose *Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India* became an influential text among EIC officials, had detailed the extreme social disabilities suffered by the lowest castes, who he referred to as slaves and compared their position unfavourably with that of African slaves in the West Indies.[41] Francis Buchanan's 1801 account of the social, economic and religious state of South India likewise described the lamentable condition of a range of different slave castes,[42] while in the same year J. G. Ravenshaw, the Collector at Mangalore, gave an overview of the different subgroups within the 'Daerd' (*dher*) caste, who he described as 'conditional servants for life'.[43] Notwithstanding these early interventions, however, the issue of agricultural slavery in South India only achieved real prominence in the second decade of the nineteenth century when, prompted by the indefatigable Baber, the Board of Revenue instituted an enquiry into the state of slavery in the various EIC districts of South India.

Although the trade to Anjarakandy had been effectively suppressed in 1812–3, Baber continued to be concerned about the welfare of slaves in his region, and in 1814 wrote to government enquiring how far he should 'sanction with my authority the sale of men, women and children of the tribe of slaves … in execution of decrees of court, or to take cognisance of disputes between persons claiming that description of natives as their rightful property, or of complaints of such alleged owners against their slaves, for desertion and refusing to work.' He also questioned 'whether Europeans are allowed to become purchasers, and whether, under any circumstances whatever, it would be lawful for the collector to attach, and the judge to cause the sale of slaves by public auction, in satisfaction of revenue arrears, with or separate from the estate on which they were born.' He recommended the subject to the consideration of government on the grounds that although the general question of slavery, as recognised by Hindu and Muslim laws, was not affected by the 1807 and 1811 legislation on the slave trade, the 'wretchedness and diminutive appearance' of the slaves made it a subject 'well

worthy of the humane consideration' of the Governor. Baber hoped that the Governor might enact legislative provisions to ameliorate their condition, especially by preventing them 'being sold out of the talook [local revenue district], or indeed off the estate, the place of their nativity, and above all, from being exposed for sale by public auction, in execution of decrees, or in satisfaction of revenue demands.'[44]

In response to Baber's letter, the Governor, Sir Thomas Munro, asked the Board of Revenue to provide him with their thoughts on the subject. Nothing was done for a further four years, however, until the issue was finally raised in a minute dealing with changes in the system of revenue in the region. In a section on the rights of the labourer, the Board of Revenue admitted that slavery was an issue that had hitherto received scant attention. 'It is not, perhaps, sufficiently known,' they remarked, 'that throughout the Tamil country, as well as in Malabar and Canara, the greater part of the labouring classes of the people have, from time immemorial, been in a state of acknowledged bondage, in which they continue to the present time.' Although the Board believed, somewhat optimistically, that in regions close to the presidency, 'where a general knowledge prevails, that the spirit of our government is inimical to bondage', this had contributed to rendering the slaves' condition superior to their brethren in more distant parts, they still reflected on

> those evils that are inseparable from even the mildest state of slavery, and consider how large a portion of our most industrious subjects are at present totally deprived of a free market for their labour, restricted by inheritance to a mere subsistence, and sold and transferred with the land which they till, policy no less than humanity would appear to dictate the propriety of gradually relieving them from those restrictions which have reduced them, and must otherwise continue to confine them to a condition scarcely superior to that of the cattle which they follow at the plough.
>
> While such, in the opinion of the Board, ought to be the policy to be pursued with regard to this class of people, it would be obviously unjust to interfere with the private property, which there can be no doubt the ryots at present possess in their slaves: and it might be dangerous too suddenly to disturb the long-established relations in society subsisting between these two orders. For the present, therefore, it would seem sufficient, with the view to prevent oppression, or abuse of authority, to define by legislative enactments the power which may be lawfully exercised by a ryot over his slaves.[45]

They added, however, that as the revenue records did not currently contain sufficient information to determine this point, the opinions of the various Collectors at Canara, Malabar and the Tamil country would need to be solicited before any proposals for reform could be put forward. In response,

Governor Munro ordered the Board of Revenue to undertake an inquiry and submit a full report on the subject, including their opinion as to whether slavery should be ameliorated, or abolished altogether, 'as productive of evils for which no adequate remedy can be devised.'[46] Accordingly, the Board of Revenue requested reports from EIC officials across the Presidency, asking them to state particularly 'the precise power, which, according to the custom of the country, the owner possesses over the person of the slave—whether he can be sold independently of the land, and any other peculiarities incident to the condition of this class of people, and on the other hand, what rights and privileges they may possess by virtue of their situation.'[47] The responses received reflected the diverse range of labour relationships, obligations, rights and statuses that prevailed in different parts of the Presidency. They also, indirectly, revealed the tensions, preconceptions and concerns that helped to shape both colonial discourse and colonial policy on agricultural slavery in South India.

As Dharma Kumar points out, the term slavery does not accurately describe the many different forms of traditional bondage in India, or get to the root of the relationship between forms of 'unfree' labour and caste obligations.[48] Thus, although a range of labour relationships were discussed under the wider rubric of slavery, it was clear that most of the so-called 'slave castes' that British administrators encountered in South India did not readily conform to the prototypical image of the slave as both 'a factor of production' and 'a freely marketable commodity'.[49] Reports on slavery collected by the Board of Revenue from across Malabar, Kanara and the Tamil country contained descriptions of a range of relationships of dependence and obligation that varied by location and caste, in which the labourer was, to differing degrees, neither completely 'free' nor exactly slave. As Kumar puts it, 'The fact of agricultural bondage was palpable. But did it amount to slavery? Or did the residual rights of the labourers raise their status?'[50] The answer to these questions varied with location and with the ideological and political imperatives of the observer.

In their studies of slavery and labour in nineteenth-century South India, both Kumar and Hjejle have followed the Board of Revenue itself in dividing the area under EIC control into three main regions, corresponding loosely to the dominant linguistic groups and containing different forms of agricultural bondage.[51] Though formerly slaves, by the early nineteenth century the labourers in the northern Telegu-speaking areas were generally considered free. In the Tamil areas and in Malabar and Kanara, however, many of the labourers were deemed to be 'unfree', although the precise conditions of their bondage varied with the different land tenures in force in different regions. In Tamil areas, the labourers tended to belong collectively to the community, and were tied to the land, rarely being sold away from

it. In Malabar and Kanara, where land was more likely to be held as private property, they were often the personal assets of an owner, and could be sold or mortgaged individually. These differences were reinforced by the fact that caste disabilities were most vigorously and rigidly enforced on the west coast, and in particular in Malabar. They were marginally less severe in the Tamil districts and most relaxed in the Telugu speaking districts of the north-east. Such differentials could effect the treatment of slaves and/or lower castes, while varying levels of productivity and fertility in different regions could also impact on both agricultural structures and existential conditions for the labouring classes. Many colonial accounts of slave impoverishment came from the poorer areas; Kumar notes that almost every administrator who went to Malabar in the early nineteenth century reported the rigour of the slavery and the wretchedness of the slaves.[52] The experience of slaves in more prosperous regions was more ambiguous: indeed, even Graeme's report on Malabar noted the differences in conditions within that district, saying of the slave, 'on the coast at least he is an industrious, and not an unintelligent being, and in good condition, and nothing deficient in bodily frame. In the interior, he is a wretched, half starved, diminutive creature, stinted in his food and exposed to the inclemencies of the weather.'[53]

The complex picture of agricultural bondage created by regional variations in the customary conditions of servitude and the lived experience of the slaves was further complicated by the fact that individuals belonging to so-called 'slave castes', which were held collectively by the village elites for whom they worked, might also sell themselves, or their relatives, into personal slavery to a specific individual, in return for a loan or support. As a result, individuals or groups of slaves could be subject to more than one form of obligation, and more than one type of proprietor, simultaneously. As Hjejle points out, 'much of the confusion in terminology which may be found in later official reports can be explained by the simple fact that both these varieties flourished side by side in villages.'[54] As a result there was considerable debate about whether these conditions amounted to actual slavery, or whether other terms—'allodial slave of the soil', 'agricultural serf', 'villein', '*adscriptus glebae*' or 'conditional servant for life'—were more appropriate. 'Faced with these groups, which were clearly in some degree or other of servitude', Kumar notes, colonial officials fell back on 'a palimpsest of definitions, none of which fitted South Indian conditions.'[55]

If the precise nature of their servitude was open to debate, most colonial officials agreed that slaves throughout South India occupied the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy. Unlike domestic slavery, where a premium was placed on high-caste slaves because of the proximity in which they and their owners lived and the intimate nature of some of the tasks they performed,

agricultural slaves tended to be from the 'impure' castes, especially the so-called 'untouchables'. As the Board of Revenue put it,

> In all of these districts, the labourer who holds the plough, and performs the inferior offices of husbandry, is of the lowest, poorest, most ignorant, yet most numerous order in society; in general an outcast, or at least of the degraded class of Hindoos, and therefore usually resident in the outskirts of his village, everywhere without any property in the land which he can transfer by gift, sale or bequest, and receiving from his employer, the *ryot*, little more than food, with a scanty supply of raiment.[56]

Of course, the extreme functioning of caste disabilities in parts of South India led many British colonial officials to conceptualise the lower castes as existing in 'slave-like' relationships of dependence with the higher castes, even when they were not actually deemed slaves.[57] 'Untouchables' were considered polluting, even at a distance, were denied admission to markets, temples, public roads and wells, and were often treated little better than animal stock. Thus, Buchanan noted,

> When a man's stock of cows is larger, they are kept, with the labouring cattle, in a house built at some distance from the abode of free-men, in the place where the slaves are permitted to dwell when the crop is not on the ground; for these poor creatures are considered as too impure to be permitted to approach the house of their *Devaru*, or lord.[58]

In this way, as Kooiman points out, the slaves' 'social degradation received a ritual sanction, although their labour power provided the major foundation on which local society rested.'[59]

The existence of this ritual dimension to oppression blurred the boundaries between economic enslavement and caste obligation. Indeed, some colonial officials even rejected the need to ameliorate the slaves' condition on the basis that the caste system meant that most Hindus were essentially 'unfree' anyway. As J. Vaughn, the Collector at Malabar, put it, 'What is Hindoo jurisprudence, in some points of view, but a state of slavery to customs, any deviation from which is punished by being out-casted, and driven from every privilege they religiously value?'[60] Similarly, C. Hyde, the Collector at Southern Arcot, noted that 'The Hindoo code of laws, religious and civil … declare that the Sudra tribe are naturally born in a state of servitude; and although some of the superior of the subdivisions of that tribe in modern days have emancipated themselves from this degrading thraldom, yet the lower castes are always looked upon as natural slaves.'[61] Yet too close an association between low-caste status and slavery would be misleading. Not all slaves came from this social background, for while a higher-caste

individual could not become the slave of a lower one, they could become enslaved to their caste equals, or superiors, through debt bondage, or loss of caste. Conversely, not all 'untouchables' were slaves, and those who were occupied a range of statuses and experienced different limitations on their freedom and obligations to their caste superiors. Although slave groups tended to occupy the very bottom of the caste hierarchy, there were further divisions within them, and each subgroup appeared to have firmly articulated rights and disabilities that differed according to status and region. Thus, J. G. Ravenshaw, writing in 1801, had noted that the *dhers* could be divided into three groups. The 'Magor Daerds', he claimed, came 'nearest the description of slaves' and could be bought and sold, although even their service was conditional upon their master giving them the customary allowance of rice and cloth. If this was not forthcoming, they could, in principle, recover the balance, and they could oppose sale to a new master of whom they had legitimate cause to 'dread'. The second group, the 'Maurey Daerd', were attached to the land and had similar privileges to the first group, except that they also had the right to leave their master's service if he did not fulfil his obligations to them. Finally, the 'Moondaul Daerd' entered perpetual and hereditary service when their wedding expenses were paid by the master. Those in this group were never bought and sold, although they could be mortgaged by their owner. That J. G. Ravenshaw considered these divisions to be based primarily on caste is apparent from his discussion of the rules of intermarriage and commensality that structured their interactions with each other, as well as with the dominant peasants who owned them.[62] Similarly, Francis Buchanan, writing about the same time, noted that 'The slaves are of different castes, such as *Parriar*, *Vullam*, *Canacun*, *Erilay*, &c.; and the differences in the customs by which the marriages of these castes are regulated occasion a considerable variation in the right of the master to the children of his slaves, according to the caste to which they belong.'[63]

The tendency of colonial officials to understand relationships of agricultural dependence, obligation and oppression through the lens of caste is not surprising, given their wider understanding of that system's role in structuring all Indian social interactions. While contemporary historians today question the extent to which the immutable and immemorial caste system described by both colonial officials and evangelical observers ever really existed, in the early nineteenth century it was widely accepted that caste represented a universal and rigid hierarchy that left no room for social mobility or individuality. 'The slaves now in existence have been slaves from their birth,' one colonial official remarked,

> they are descendants of slaves, whose origins must be traced in the traditionary legends of Malabar. They are subdivided into distinct castes or sects,

> observe different forms of worship, have their separate and peculiar customs, and regulate their economy in conformity to the customs handed down from father to son for generations, the origin of which is lost in the abyss of time.[64]

Although they admitted that they were unable to trace the origin of slavery in South India, or the stages by which it reached its present form, the Board of Revenue were convinced that 'it certainly has existed from time immemorial in this country'. Originally, of course, such institutions had not been confined to the Hindus 'but appear to have been common to all other ancient nations'. While retrogressive practices had been cast off in other countries, however, in India they were maintained by Hindu devotions to ancient traditions and ancestral customs, reinforcing the colonial image of Indian society as stagnant and unchanging. As one colonial official put it,

> In India, manners and customs, and with them the condition of the people, have undergone, it is believed, in the course of time, less change than in any other country. It is perhaps to the early division of the people into castes, the consequent subjection of one part of the community to the other, and the concomitant custom of children invariably following the same profession, and obtaining their livelihood by the same means as their fathers, that the permanency of Indian institutions, and the immutability of the manners of the inhabitants is to be principally ascribed. Accordingly, we find that the present state of Hindoo slaves, as described by the collectors, appears to be nearly the same as it was defined and intended to be by the laws of Menu.[65]

The emphasis on the relationship between caste and unfree forms of labour colours both colonial accounts and the more recent historiography of slavery and abolition, which has broadly assumed that this relationship made Indian forms of bondage unique and exceptional. Slavery in India was primarily distinguished from others forms by 'its intimate relationship with the Indian caste system', Howard Temperley argues, 'From top to bottom it was characterized by strongly held notions of hierarchy and deference, one result of which was that there was no ready way of distinguishing where obligations associated with slavery ended and other types of obligation began.'[66] The difficulty with such interpretations, as Indrani Chatterjee so convincingly argues, is that our conception of the caste system has itself been shaped by colonial officials and scholars, many of whom were influenced by plantocratic ideals and slave systems in other parts of the world. Influential orientalist scholar Henry Colebrooke, for example, was himself an aspiring planter, and Chatterjee believes that this influenced the way in which he conflated the manual labour performed by low-caste groups with a loss of citizenship and origins in slavery.[67] In pre-colonial India, of course, the distinctions

between 'free-born' and so-called 'slave castes' were less clear cut, and caste identity was neither as all-encompassing nor as fixed as colonial accounts implied. Indeed, Susan Bayly argues that far from being long-standing traditional formulations, the basis of caste society emerged in the century before colonial rule and reflected the political expediencies of newly emerging elite groups rather than timeless religious ideas.[68] British colonial ethnographers, as well as subsequent anthropologists and sociologists, however, looked at India's multilayered, complex and often fluid social systems and attempted to reduce them into a static social hierarchy of castes based on birth and ritual divisions between purity and pollution. Moreover, through their attempts to understand, codify, categorise and count the people of India, a previously dynamic and negotiable social system became solidified and fixed. Certainly colonial interpretations of caste were not neutral; they looked to the scriptures for their understanding of domestic and social norms and relied heavily on the interpretations of Brahmin pandits for their view of Hindu society. These interpretations, as Washbrook points out, 'reflected a Brahminical view of society, which saw its structure in terms of immutable religious principles. Under their influence, the personal law recognized and validated the caste system and the varna theory of social order.'[69] Nick Dirks goes as far as to suggest that the caste system, as we now know it, was in part a British/European construction that emerged through the various ethnographic and pedagogic processes of colonial knowledge formation.[70]

From this perspective, colonial officials who discussed Indian slavery in terms of caste status were not simply faithfully describing an immutable system, but contributing to the colonial construction of caste itself. The very characteristics of the caste system that they referred to in order to explain why slavery in India was so difficult to eradicate were themselves fashioned out of a colonial conception of caste that had, in its turn, been influenced by analogies to other practices and forms of hereditary status, such as slavery. Thus, Chatterjee notes that the idea of 'social disabilities inherited in the blood', which was a prominent feature of colonial conceptions of caste, bore many similarities to the legal and social frameworks of North American slavery.[71] Yet for those EIC officials who espoused anti-slavery sentiment in general terms, while defending the continuation of Indian forms of bondage on pragmatic grounds, there was a nice distinction to be made. Vaughn, for example, argued that the difference between those born into slave castes in India and those born into slavery in the West Indies was that the latter, though legally still considered slaves, 'are the offspring of originally free-born men, who have been trapped into a state of slavery by a vile traffic in human flesh', while the slave castes were trapped in an immutable and ahistorical bondage.[72] Thus, the African slave in the West Indies, though bound by an illegitimate but prevailing system, had 'freedom' inherited in the blood from

his ancestors; Indian slaves were, and always had been, slaves by birth, and this in itself lessened the severity of their bondage. As Graeme put it,

> In comparison with some other parts of the world, the slavery of Malabar may be considered of a mild description. The individuals are born in it, and it is a second nature to them. The habits of their lives from childhood are formed in subservience and accommodation to it, and they feel no impatient irksomeness arising from the cherished memory of rights and comforts once enjoyed, which they have recently lost, or from a spirit of proud independence conscious of a title to higher privileges and indignant at an unjust exclusion from them.[73]

That ideas of caste identity were fundamental to EIC officials' interpretation of legitimate and illegitimate forms of bondage in South India is demonstrated by Baber's differential treatment of 'free-born' and *pulaya* slaves found on the Anjarakandy plantation, and the emphasis he placed on violation of caste as an aggravating factor in the traffic. 'Free-born' children, he noted, had their caste desecrated by having their 'koodeema' (lock of hair identifying caste status) cut off and by being forced into close contact with members of the lower castes. This ritual defilement began even before their arrival at the plantation: Baber noted of the children he released from the house of Wallapagata Assen Ally, 'They were all disguised as Moplah children, the girls being dressed in the Moplah coopai, their ears pierced and ornamented with rings, and the boys had been deprived of their koodeema, or lock of hair (the distinguishing mark of caste), and all had Moplah names given to them.' Some had even 'been converted to Mahommedanism, and others associated with and made to eat the food of the Pooliars, and thereby irretrievably excluded from their caste.'[74] On arrival at Anjarakandy, Baber reported, 'they refused to eat the food of the Pooliars, but the Walia and Cheria Achan (the names Mr. Brown and his son go by on the plantation) made them do so.'[75] Such violations, in Baber's view, aggravated the fact of their abduction. 'From the earliest period of the administration in Malabar', he remarked, 'kidnapping, because involving a loss of caste as well as liberty, has been considered a most heinous offence.' In Malabar, clothing high-caste children as *mapillas* was considered equivalent to proselytism, an offence that had always been punished, even under the British government. In 1807, Baber noted, a *mapilla* who was tried for enticing away a high-caste child and cutting off the koodeema was found guilty and sentenced to three years' imprisonment with hard labour and twenty-four stripes.[76]

The judges of the provincial court, though hostile to Baber's anti-slavery activities, were also influenced by assumptions that it was caste identity rather than an individual's specific route into slavery on the plantation that

was the key determinant of legitimate ownership. Thus they did not contest the removal of the 'free-born' children found in Brown's service, but believed that Baber's actions in removing and questioning even apparently kidnapped *pulayas* was irregular. That their concern lay with the rights of the proprietor rather than the slave is also clear, as they maintained that Brown could not be charged under Regulation XI of 1809, or any other regulation, because the only evidence was the testimony of the slaves themselves. In order to proceed, they argued, the original owners of the bondsmen would have to come forward and complain of their loss. Stolen labourers of slave castes were not considered to have the same individual rights in law as 'free-born' children; indeed, with respect to the *pulayas*, the injury of their kidnap, natal alienation and separation from their families was one visited on their owners, rather than on themselves. Thus, when three *pulaya* children were kidnapped from Chericul and Cannanore and sold, their father brought a complaint to the magistrate, but the Court of Quarter Sessions ruled that the father did not have the right to prosecute the slave-dealers as he was a slave himself, and it was the children's owner who should 'have had an option to prosecute the prisoners for stealing or unlawfully obtaining possession of his property'.[77]

Colonial policy and colonial imperatives

Colonial officials noted a baffling array of different forms of obligation and dependence, and were likewise divided as to the moral and material implications of allowing various systems of 'unfree' labour to continue, depending on how oppressive they deemed them, and how disruptive they thought any amelioration of slave circumstances would be. In working through this issue, colonial officials confronted a range of overt and subliminal pressures that helped to shape their specific interpretations of the systems that they observed. On the one hand, their responses clearly indicate the practical imperatives of a colonial government wary of any measures that might undermine stability and profitability of the revenue. During the 1810s and 1820s, when the issue of ameliorating Indian agricultural slavery was first mooted, the EIC was still in the process of establishing its rule. Maximising and stabilising the revenue were vital in order to finance necessary military activity on the external and internal frontiers of the EIC state, and any innovations that might potentially jeopardise this were treated with caution. On the other hand, however, many colonial officials appear to have been motivated by a conscious, or subconscious, desire to articulate their own identity in a way that equated 'Britishness' with freedom, distinguishing themselves both from the slave-holding Indian elite and the slave-holding

West Indian planter. In doing so, they were discursively formulating the nature of the colonial project in India in terms that both justified it and set it apart from the increasingly moribund West Indian system, without actually intervening materially to alter the condition of the slaves on whose labour the bulk of the agricultural production, and thus the revenue, depended.

The abovementioned tensions were summed up as early as 1801, when J. G. Ravenshaw sought to defend the status quo in his district by preventing the 'conditional servants for life' who tilled the soil finding other employment by enlisting in the EIC's army. Slavery, he maintained, was objected to

> as being contrary to the fundamental principles of morality, because both men and women, in that state it is said, are tempted to commit and excite others to crimes they would not do in a free state. Supposing that the service of the Daerds could be construed slavery, which in my opinion it cannot, the same objection does not apply to it, because with them, it is merely the custom of their caste; and they are in general more constant and attached to their wives and family, who live with them, than most other sects. So far, therefore, from conceiving there can be any radical objection made to this kind of service, I am of the opinion it is productive of very important and political as well as moral good, and especially so, because it is one of the soundest and most necessary props to the support and even existence of that meritorious spirit of industry and agriculture, which the natives of Canara are so peculiarly possessed of.[78]

By avoiding the use of the controversial word 'slave' when describing the status of the *dhers*, Ravenshaw was able rationalise support of a system that was essential for the maintenance of local agricultural production, and thus the collection of revenue. Significantly, his initial investigation had been prompted when, on a visit to the local area, many of the labourers had complained to him of 'being ill-treated by their masters'.[79] Yet if his initial interest was sparked by concerns about their welfare, his priorities quickly changed when the imminent arrival of a Bombay recruiting officer sparked fears that they would be encouraged to enlist in the army without their owners' permission. When he warned the Board of Revenue that 'An evil is taking root in Canara', which, if not 'very soon checked, it will most materially affect the value of landed property, and the cultivation of the country', he was referring not to the 'slave like' conditions of the *dhers*, or their mistreatment, but to the possibility that they might actually find a route out of their servitude. 'Nearly the whole cultivation of the country is carried on by Daerds and slaves of other sorts', he reported, adding 'an estate, indeed, without a property in some of these people, would be of little value, because day labourers are not to be procured in this as in other countries.' On this basis, he questioned whether it was 'politic' to allow them to escape

their masters, whose right to their service was 'good and legal'. The landlords of Canara had 'suffered considerable loss' from their slaves enlisting without their consent, and this, he argued, would be 'the cause of every possible mischief towards checking the prosperity of the country … the very fabric of the agricultural system will be undermined'.[80] The Board of Revenue agreed, remarking that

> the encouraging of these slaves thus to desert their masters, would be disturbing a property sanctioned to them by the usages of the country, and the ordinances of their law; and while it would be of no advantage to the army, it would be of considerable detriment to the revenue, for not only in Canara, but in several parts of India, it is this class of people who cultivate the soil, and on whose industry the landholder depends for the payment of the dues of the Sirkar, and for the means of his own support.[81]

Nearly two decades later, in 1819, collectors and officials around South India would raise similar pragmatic concerns about the consequences of abolitionism. C. M. Lushington, the Collector at Trichinopoly, warned that 'so far as relates to the revenue of this district (and I trust my opinion will not be supposed to extend further), the abolition of the puller [*pulaya*] system would be attended with the most serious and ruinous consequences', summing up the issue by noting that although it could be urged that there was something degrading about a government being concerned with selling human beings, under the existing agricultural conditions, he could 'see no possible means of collecting the revenue or cultivating the land without the institution of pullers'.[82]

Although there were a few colonial officials, such as Baber, whose consistent opposition to slavery on principle seems to have transcended political, pragmatic or commercial interests, most accounts collected by the Board of Revenue in 1819 paid lip service to the ideal of free labour, while at the same time defending the status quo. By 1819, of course, anti-slavery sentiment had become a potent indicator of civilisation, progress and 'Britishness'. Even those officials who opposed any interference with the structures of agrarian society emphasised their rejection of slavery in principle. C. M. Lushington, the Collector at Trichinopoly, for example, began his defence of the South Indian slave system by saying 'There is something so revolting and abhorrent to an Englishman in the idea of slavery, that the advocates for its continuance in any shape, must ever labour under the disadvantage of pre-judgement.'[83] Similarly, Collector J. Vaughn, who also opposed any interference with the existing system, noted,

> Few men of liberal education are insensible of the barbarity of trafficking in slaves; but if we let our ideas of humanity run blindly away with our senses,

> we may be guilty of greater acts of injustice and oppression than justice and humanity; and whatever my own private feelings may be, I consider it my duty, both as collector and magistrate, to support and protect the natives in the legal discharge of their ordinary and domestic legal duties and functions, however inconsistent with my own nicer feelings of humanity, leaving it to enact such regulations for the protection of humanity, as in its wisdom it may seem fit.[84]

Yet Vaughn, at least, also recognised the contradiction in attacking Indian slavery when their own compatriots continued to benefit from the labour of enslaved Africans. Could they, with justice, he asked, deprive the Indian slave-holding elite, of their rights to slaves, when the same right was still enjoyed by their countrymen in the West Indies? 'I am much mistaken', Vaughn reminded the Board of Revenue, 'if our enlightened authority at home has not passed an Act legalising the transfer of slaves in the West Indies from isle to isle.'[85]

The result of such conflicting imperatives was a reconstruction of Indian forms of bondage as qualitatively different from West Indian slavery. Because the sort of slavery existing in South India did not bring with it

> the horrors of being torn violently from country of their birth, from their nearest and most endeared kindred; of being degraded to the level of beasts, and sold like them; of suffering the cruelties of ship imprisonment; of being forced to adopt new habits of life; new kinds of food; new modes of dress; and a new language; subjected to a foreign master, speaking a strange language and frequently devoid of any sympathetic feeling towards them

even Graeme did not believe it could be compared to the transatlantic trade, however miserable the actual condition in which Indian slaves were found.[86] The Board of Revenue itself started its inquiry from the position that 'There cannot … be a doubt that the slavery prevalent among the lower classes of the Hindus is of a very different and opposite nature from that so strongly and justly reprobated in England.'[87] Foreign traffic or the external commerce in slaves was considered quite different from South Indian agrestic slavery, where the bondsman, though playing an important part in production, also enjoyed certain admitted rights that accrued to him from his caste. The specific conditions of Hindu society, as well as the inherent nature of Hindus themselves, made slavery, if not desirable, then at least acceptable for many colonial observers. 'On a cool and impartial consideration of the state of the slaves in Malabar,' Vaughn asserted, 'slaves may be described as a distinct caste, with appropriate and distinct customs, which have been handed down to them by their ancestors, and which are by them religiously adhered to, and they may be, I conceive, viewed in any light but that of an abject and

horrid state of bondage.'[88] Thus, although both the Abbé Dubois and Francis Buchanan considered the state of Indian agricultural slaves to be worse than that of the Africans in the West Indies, the generally accepted view was that agrarian slavery in South India was a relatively mild form of bondage. Some, like Lushington and Vaughn, even believed that the slaves were better off than free labourers, as they enjoyed a greater degree of security. As Vaughn put it,

> in some respects the Churmars may be considered in more comfortable circumstances than any of the lower and poorer class of natives. An instance of a Churmar being a beggar is unheard of; they and their families are sure of having the means of subsistence … contrast this with the situation of the free-born but poor labourer, depending on the labours of the day for his subsistence, unable, perhaps, to find employment, with a wife and family to support, and no one to whom he can look up for protection or subsistence. In attempting to ameliorate the condition of these slaves, care must be taken that we do not increase them.[89]

The idea that slaves in some areas received a sum of money, either in return for selling their own services in times of hardship, or in the traditionally rendered marriage expenses, appeared to insert a degree of voluntarism and complicity into the slave system. Thus, C. Hyde noted that

> although the state of servitude is ever repugnant to nature and humanity, yet I do not hesitate to express my opinion, that the state of bondage, as it prevails in India, is free from many objections that exist against the West Indian slavery, for here the convention is mutual, the slaves enjoy the purchase money, and are not compelled by oppressive power to become bondsmen in a foreign land, and as their contracts proceed from themselves, the odium annexed to the despotic mode of constituting slavery in Africa is obviated.[90]

Similarly, J. Hepburn, the Collector at Tanjore, reported that the form of slavery in his district 'is widely different to what is understood by the term slavery in other parts of the world, the whole in the first instance being founded upon a voluntary contract between the parties'. The *pulayas* and the *pariahs*, he argued, voluntarily entered into agreements with more powerful men 'upon whom they thus impose a more strict obligation to maintain them and their families than if merely serving them as labouring servants' although he admitted that this bond, once executed, was binding on the children of the original slave in perpetuity. Their condition, he maintained,

> differs very little from that of the common labourer, and the treatment of both is nearly the same. The disadvantage to the bondsman is the power of

> being sold or transferred to other masters … the advantages are, the more effectually securing subsistence and protection to themselves and their families, particularly in times of trouble or difficulty, than it is binding upon masters to bestow on common labourers, and this without rendering their condition in any degree intolerable.[91]

Other, such as Graeme and Baber, argued that while their lot might not be as bad as African slaves in the West Indies, it was harsh and in need of amelioration. Thus, Graeme wrote,

> though it may be allowed, that slavery in Malabar is not intolerable, and not exercised to an excessive degree of active cruelty, the diminutive and squalid appearance, and the wretched hovels of a race of beings in the province … sufficiently indicate that they do not enjoy that comfortable state of existence which every person should at least have it in his power to acquire by his labour. There are, no doubt, many freemen in the different ranks of society who are equally indigent with the slave. The slave is scarcely ever exposed to the extremity of actual starvation, and … a beggar of this caste is scarcely ever found … but it matters not that that many worthless characters are in worse circumstances; the question is, whether slaves are as comfortable as they ought to be, and whether they acquire as much by their own industry in servitude as they would in a free state?[92]

Of course, contradictions within colonial accounts of labour condition reflect the wide regional variation in agricultural practice in the area under study, but they should also prompt us to question the dominant colonial paradigm of mild Indian slavery. Benedicte Hjejle, in particular, has encouraged us to reconsider both the reliability of the evidence put forward in colonial reports and the ideological agenda, or subjectivity, of the colonial official interpreting it. Pointing to the harshness of agricultural labour conditions for the lower castes, free or slave, Hjejle reminds us not to lose sight of where the 'evidence' for 'mild agrarian bondage' comes from.[93] On proffering opinions on this matter, none of the collectors questioned in 1819 claimed to have received any direct information from the slaves themselves, either through court cases or complaints; as Baber later pointed out, the predial slaves, 'from being considered so very impure', did not have the advantage of being able to approach free men, and so 'have not thereby the means of making their complaints known, in case of any very severe treatment'. Indeed, the Board of Revenue itself admitted that 'with this description of person, the government officers have seldom had any direct communication'.[94] Few of the colonial officials who offered opinions on the subject in response to the Board of Revenue's enquiry of 1819 appear to have instigated any detailed inquiry and most probably relied on

their native officers for information. J. Hutt, in North Arcot, for example, collected his information from the local *tahsildars* (native revenue officials). 'As a great many of these were slave-owners themselves', Hjejle remarks, they would have had 'no desire to supply their British masters with any reliable information on a question as thorny as this.'[95] Worse still was the strategy employed by the Collector at Malabar, Vaughn, who collated his information directly from the statements of the very same large landholders who were the primary beneficiaries of slave labour; not surprisingly, the picture painted was that of mild bondage and mutual obligation.

Vaughn's arguments in favour of benign, and even benevolent, slavery are riddled with inconsistencies, especially when read alongside the actual statements of the landlords themselves, several of which directly acknowledged the harsh treatment meted out to slaves. Almost all of these reports admitted that in the past a *cherman* (slave) who committed a fault, or was caught after desertion, might be bound, flogged, locked up, put in the stocks or be 'punished in such manner as it would please him [his master], provided it does not deprive him of life'.[96] Although several predictably emphasised that 'at present the corporeal punishment afflicted is but of a lenient nature', others openly admitted that flogging, putting in the stocks and working in irons still happened. One report noted of an errant slave that 'formerly he would be flogged, put in the stocks, and his nose cut off; but at present the latter mode of punishing is never resorted to', implying that the other two still occurred.[97] Of course, such punishments must be understood in the context both of existing labour law, which legitimised a degree of penal power over free and unfree labourers, and of the quotidian violence of the EIC state's agrarian relations. Revenue collection in the early nineteenth century was 'militarised'; groups of sepoys and auxiliaries attended the day-to-day operations of the bureaucracy and physical intimidation and violence were 'routine elements in the revenue system'.[98] Vaughn, however, maintained that 'the proprietor feels it in his interest to see them well treated, through apprehensions of the consequences of opposite conduct', arguing that if mistreated the slaves would simply desert to another master 'from whom they expected kinder usage'. In the same paragraph, apparently unaware of the contradiction, he noted that desertion was the one offence that would still occasion rigorous punishment by masters who had extensive penal power over their slaves. 'But there were many circumstances', he added, without substantiation, 'which would have operated as a check on the gratification of the species of severity and revenge.'[99]

Others were less optimistic about a slave's situation and ability to access legal redress. On interviewing a slave in 1823 whose nose had formerly been amputated, Baber noted that the slave had not complained of his

mistreatment because 'he would only be worse treated if he did'. Baber was adamant that 'cruelties are practised upon the slaves of Malabar, and that our courts and cutcherries are no restraints upon their owners or employers', noting that in the case of the nose amputation the matter had come before the courts, but no steps had been taken to bring the perpetrators to justice.[100] Thus, while Graeme maintained that the slaves' 'condition is undoubtedly improved considerably under the Company's government; for the British law has extended its protection to them in common with all, against injury to their lives and limbs, or any great severity of ill usage',[101] Baber was clear that 'If it is to depend on the slaves themselves to seek for the protection of the laws, their situation must be hopeless indeed, for having no means of subsistence, independent of their owners or employers, their repairing to and attending upon a public cutcherry, is a thing physically impossible.'[102] Moreover, even if all the current obstacles were overcome, unless the slave was ultimately freed, their situation would only become more intolerable than before they complained. Given the well-known deficiencies of the Company courts, it seems unlikely that slave complainants would be able to avoid the widespread abuses that would surely have worked in favour of their owners.[103] Even Graeme admitted that

> in most places the slaves have been too entirely dependent upon their masters, and the interference of the magisterial authority has hitherto been so systematically withheld from regulating the modus of their daily food, that they could not, with any prudent regard to the interests of themselves and families, resort to a higher power.[104]

In putting together its report on slavery, which it presented to government as a Minute in 1819, the Board of Revenue relied heavily on the reports it had collected from its officials in the various regions under its superintendence, often simply citing long passages verbatim and favouring those replies, or sections of replies, that presented relatively mild agricultural conditions. It is true that optimistic reports were numerically superior among those submitted, but many of these were based on limited knowledge or research. The outlook of those officials who had taken trouble to conduct personal and detailed inquiries tended to be bleaker.[105] Some, like Baber, adverted to the slaves' palpable wretchedness, while Francis Buchanan, whose *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar* is perhaps the most detailed colonial study of labour relations and social conditions in South India for the period under question, noted that although the master was obliged to give the slave a certain allowance of provisions, the usual amount was only

> two-sevenths of the allowance that I consider as reasonable for persons of all ages included. Children, and old persons past labour, get one half only of this pittance; and no allowance whatever is made for infants. This would be totally inadequate to support them; but the slaves on each estate get one-twenty-first part of the gross produce of the rice, in order to encourage them to care and industry

adding that they lived in 'small temporary huts, that are little better than large baskets'.[106] When slaves were mortgaged out, their condition was even worse, as their temporary master had no permanent interest in them. This system, Buchanan maintained, was 'utterly abominable; for the person who exacts the labour, and furnishes the subsistence of the slave, is directly interested to increase the former and diminish the latter as much as possible.' Indeed, Buchanan maintained that 'the slaves are very severely treated; and their diminutive stature and squalid appearance show evidently a want of adequate nourishment.'[107] Similarly, Graeme noted that 'the slave alone has his sieve hut in the middle of the rice lands', and that in some areas he was 'wretched' and 'half-starved'.[108]

Given these pessimistic accounts, we must question the relatively positive interpretations of slave conditions that were passed up through the EIC hierarchy, from the Board of Revenue to the Governor, and then to the Court of Directors and Board of Control. As Hjejle puts it 'the Board [of Revenue] suffered from its own prejudices, which were that things should look bright and run smoothly … the more optimistic reports were always allowed to take precedence over those which offered a grimmer view and described conditions as wretched and stationary.'[109] This is not surprising, of course, as the government in India had a vested interest in avoiding unwanted interference or inconvenient directives by presenting a positive view of things to both the Court of Directors and the Board of Control, even if that meant stifling, or marginalising, problematic information. In December 1821 the Court of Directors in London complained that 'Of the condition of these people [the lower castes], we know hardly anything, and not more with respect to the other descriptions of the population. We are told, indeed, that part of them (an article of very unwelcome intelligence) are held as slaves; that they are attached to the soils as marketable property.'[110] When they instructed the government to obtain and communicate to them 'all the useful information' they could regarding the condition of the slaves, the Governor of Madras directed them to the 1819 report, adding that

> [in] Malabar a numerous class of labourers employed in agriculture have not the free disposal of their own industry, but are in a particular state of servitude. Their condition may, therefore, with more propriety be regarded as dependent on the treatment which they receive from their masters, than

> as capable of being improved by Government. But the consideration of the measures proper to be taken with respect to the kinds of slavery found to exist in India, relates to a subject of great delicacy and considerable difficulty; and we are of opinion that it is a matter in which more good is to be expected from the gradual operation of justice and police, administered in a spirit favourable to personal liberty, than from direct interference on the part of Government.[111]

As Crispin Bates points out, the early nineteenth century was a time of radical experimentation and desperate contingency in the development of British systems of government in India, which the East India Company attempted to mask in correspondence with the home authorities by representing the outcomes of their rule as slow but progressive improvement for India.[112] Thus, Vaughn, despite admitting that no one in his office could throw any clear light on the subject, and in the absence of any apparent evidence, was convinced that there 'cannot be any doubt, but that [the condition of the slaves] has been very materially improved under the establishment of our government'.[113] Similarly, J. Hepburn, the Collector at Tanjore, believed that the 'equity and mildness' of the British government had greatly contributed towards the amelioration of their condition by 'rendering the conduct of masters to their servants indulgent, forbearing and kind'.[114]

In the light of this apparent gradual amelioration, colonial officials questioned whether the slaves really wanted emancipation, or if they would be better off for receiving it. As one official put it, 'Their habitual dependence upon superiors, would for a time, even make them uneasy upon being thrown adrift on their own resources.'[115] J. Cotton, the Collector at Tinnevelly (Tirunelveli), believed it would be 'unjust and impolitic' to declare the slaves independent without a thorough understanding of their position, but that such a minute inquiry might in itself be dangerous 'inasmuch as it would shew a disposition to disturb the long established customs of the country'. He did believe, however, that the rules relating to the slaves' treatment might be made clear to the courts, so that the slave could use them to ensure his customary allowance and good treatment, even as the master used them to ensure his title to the slave's services against desertion, or against others who might entice him away. 'Divesting the discussion of national feeling', Cotton argued, 'a man, for the sake of food and other necessities of life, is condemned to perpetual labour' and, in the absence of excessively harsh treatment, he believed the obligation to perpetual labour on the part of the slave was fully requited by the perpetual certainty of maintenance, on which those whose labour was for hire could not depend.[116] On the basis of this evidence, Governor Munro decided that direct interference to ameliorate the

condition of the slaves would produce the opposite result to those intended, and under these circumstance he did not believe 'the condition of slaves in this country, according to their own sentiments and manners, stands particularly in need of improvement."[117]

Despite rhetoric that couched defence of the status quo in the language of protecting the slaves' best interests, colonial policy was, of course, based primarily on pragmatic considerations. The cash demand of the land revenue naturally obliged farmers to grow crops for exchange. The need to keep labour tied to the land and coerce production provided a powerful incentive for the EIC to recognise and support various types of 'unfree' labour. Indeed, as Washbrook notes, EIC officials 'seem to have spent much of the early nineteenth century setting up serf-catching patrols and chasing runaways in order to bring them back to their masters'.[118] Under these circumstances, the implications of emancipation were carefully weighed and found to be too risky. J. Cotton, for example, believed that emancipation would be accompanied by one of two outcomes, both of which would be detrimental to the EIC's interests. Either slaves would desert *en masse*, in which case the land would remain uncultivated and the revenue uncollected, or the status quo would be maintained, in which case the rule of government would be proved ineffectual and its prestige damaged.[119] Even those who supported an amelioration of the slaves' circumstances recognised these practical problems. Graeme, writing in 1822, believed the slaves' 'state demands that commiseration and amelioration which may be confidently expected from the humanity of the British Government', but added the caveat that it should only be undertaken 'provided it can be shown that a change for the better can be effected without hazarding an evil of any formidable magnitude, without incurring the risk of general discontent, or exciting a worse feeling towards the objects themselves, by an unsuccessful endeavour to mitigate their treatment.' The most serious objections against any active measure in favour of the slaves, he believed, were the potential infringement of private property rights and 'the necessity to which the proprietors would be subjected of paying more for labour, employed in the cultivation of their lands, and the difficulty which the slaves would have in subsisting if left to their own devices."[120] If the slaves were to be emancipated, 'provision must be made for their future subsistence', although his concern it seems was less that they might starve than that they might 'for want of their former means ... have recourse to pilfering grain from the fields whilst crops are standing, and then, from small beginnings, proceed to more serious robberies and heinous crimes'. Graeme advocated a 'cautious' and conditional process of emancipation, in which the feelings of the individual slaves would be consulted, and none should be emancipated unless they felt confident of being able to earn their livelihood without assistance. By allowing slaves to buy themselves out

of servitude, or to be manumitted in the case of ill treatment, he argued, the worst features of the system would be undermined, while industry among the slaves would be stimulated and any mass exodus from their localities avoided. Slaves would be encouraged to remain on the 'old estates', working for their former masters, but 'more comfortably and respectably'. It might also, he noted, encourage many proprietors out of their 'indolence' and into manual labour.[121]

Based on the evidence supplied by their various local officials, the Board of Revenue ultimately concluded that

> slavery, as at present understood in Europe, cannot be said to exist in India; and that though there is a class of people here denominated slaves, their condition, treatment and circumstances differ widely from that of the unfortunate beings similarly designated in the West Indies or Africa. In India the slaves, where they do now exist, although they can be sold, transferred or given away, cannot be forcibly dragged from their native country, and doomed to a life in bondage in a foreign land; a traffic in slaves, as carried on with Africa, is entirely unknown in India, and slaves in India are to be viewed rather as useful and laborious instruments of agriculture, or of domestic service, than as articles of commerce.[122]

As slavery in India was generally 'mild and humane' and any acts of individual cruelty subject to the courts, they decided that 'it does not appear … that any immediate interference on the part of government is particularly called for'. They added, however, that although no immediate measures were called for

> it does not follow that the most useful, the most laborious, and one of the most numerous classes of subjects in these territories, should, from generation to generation, continue hereditary bondsmen of their masters, incapable of inheriting property of their own, deprived of the stimulus of industry which possession of property ever inspires; and because they are fed and clothed, and reconciled to their present condition, it does not follow that the government should confirm institutions, which doom those who have thus fallen into this condition incapable of ever again recovering their liberty, or of rising to a level with their fellow men.[123]

Thus, even as they defended the status quo, they deployed the rhetoric of a free-market, free-labour economy that they championed, but markedly failed to implement.

Plantations, slavery and indenture

Significantly, the period in which the suppression of slavery was being discussed in India was also that in which the nascent plantation system was emerging and both Baak and Kooiman see a connection between the suppression of slavery and the growth in indentured labour migration encouraged by these new enterprises.[124] By legally dissolving the slaves' 'traditional' ties to the land, locality and specific dominant castes in 1843, the colonial state theoretically freed these labourers to seek work on the plantations, although in practice many ex-slaves continued to work for their original owners for want of more attractive alternatives. The colonial construction of South Indian slavery that had emerged during the debates of the preceding decades, and the specific characteristics that were thought to define it, played a significant part in these later developments. By delineating what it meant to be 'slave' in a South Indian context, colonial officials simultaneously provided a point of reference against which coercive colonial labour systems such as indenture could be constructed as 'free'. Subsequent historians have likened indenture to 'a new form of slavery'—Amalendu Guha, for example, has compared recruitment systems for the Assamese tea plantations as resembling 'the slave running in Africa and the global slave trade'.[125] Yet colonial officials could delineate between slavery based on hereditary caste status and characterised by immobility and an indenture system based on contract and characterised by mobility and individual autonomy, even while they strengthened the penal powers of the plantation owners and limited the workers' freedom of movement through draconian measures to keep indentured labourers on the land. Thus, Barbara Evans notes that the

> methods used to recruit and retain Tamil and Malayali plantation labour for Nilgiri tea estates indicate that planters initially took their cue from the pre-existing relations between agrarian landlords and their field workers at labour's point of origin. As rural patron–client relations were mirrored in plantation contractual relations, individual labourers moving between agricultural employment and the various labour streams were provided with a continuity of experience which subsumed the different economic ends they served in the pre-capitalist and capitalist domains.[126]

There is an extensive literature on the development of the plantations in India, and the nature of the accompanying indentured labour system. Ranajit Das Gupta lists the following basic feature of the colonial plantation system:

> an agro-industrial enterprise raising one or several crops on a large scale under tropical or semi tropical climactic conditions; an international market

> orientation; the launching and subsequent maintenance of plantations under the ownership and control of foreign capital with the backing of the colonial state; the employment of large numbers of producers and labourers (not necessarily wage workers) doing hard manual work under conditions of a primitive labour process; the use of a migrant and/or immigrant labour system; and the mobilisation and control of direct producers through economic and extra-economic coercive methods with the direct and indirect support of the colonial state.[127]

Despite the emphasis that both colonial officials in India and supporters of Indian indenture in Britain placed on voluntary contract and informed consent, Das Gupta views 'the use of unfree labour, in one form or another, with a highly authoritarian structure of management of labour' as the defining characteristic of the colonial plantation system. 'Unfreedom', he argues, 'lay in the use of non-market power, and even physical coercion, as well as market power entailing the threat of hunger and denial of employment in conditions of endemic unemployment in which vast sections of direct producers faced significant risks of starvation and death.'[128] Opinion has been divided among historians as to whether indenture offered an economic opportunity for impoverished Indians or represented an oppressive labour form that although ostensibly based on free contract was in practice little better then slavery. Certainly the indenture system, which was strengthen by the Workman's Breach of Contract Act of 1859, helped to solve the colonial state's labour problems with a system that maintained substantial elements of coercion. Augmentation of the plantation owner's authority in the face of challenging labour conditions pre-dates the 1859 legislation, however. In Bengal and Bihar, for example, indigo plantations were established from the early nineteenth century on, and European planters, faced with widespread peasant resistance to the cultivation of indigo, turned to the colonial state to bolster their authority and help them coerce labour. A regulation of 1829 gave European planters *zamindari* and other tenurial land rights to enable them to overcome peasant hostility to indigo and control their production.[129]

Given the problems experienced in recruiting suitable labour for these plantation enterprises, Washbrook believes that 'it was inevitable that the state should take direct responsibility for the organisation of production and the reproduction of the agrarian base. Political influence and force were used to establish favourable conditions for the production of various commodities such as indigo, opium, tea, coffee and sisal.'[130] The recruitment strategies employed by Brown on the Anjarakandy plantation were, of course, extreme, in that he openly admitted to keeping his labourers in a state of slavery, but they were made possible by the same mixture of local power and influence and tacit sanction from the upper echelons of government that would later

underpin the planters' various powers under the indenture system. Ultimately, of course, Baber's activities in bringing conditions on the plantation to the notice of government, combined with a growth in anti-slavery sentiment among Britons after 1807, meant that Brown could no longer claim the authority of master of slaves on the plantation. This does not mean, however, that conditions or restrictions on the freedom of the labourers who worked there changed in any fundamental way. As Paul Baak points out, even after the abolition of slavery (which in Malabar took place in 1843 and in Travancore, the site of Baak's study, in 1855), the recruitment of workers remained a difficult task for the planters. Despite the fair character the government placed on the planters as 'gentlemen sincerely solicitous to deal fairly with their labourers and to rely on good treatment and good wages alone for attracting labour',[131] only in extreme circumstances, such as the famines of 1866 and 1877, did labourers volunteer *en masse* for plantation labour. Baak suggests a number of reasons for this, ranging from the security afforded to 'ex-slaves' by the relationships of obligation and dependence that existed between themselves and their former masters to the improved bargaining position derived from the increased opportunities for alternative employment on the plantations or through the Public Works Department. These allowed them to improve their position without leaving their traditional employer, while the rumours and tales which reached the villages with returning workers about the lamentable conditions on the plantations, such as disease, overwork, mistreatment and underpayment, provided a disincentive for indenture.[132]

As a result of agricultural labourers' reluctance to sign up for plantation work, later planters, like Brown before them, had to use innovative means to mobilise a workforce, and, like Brown, they employed middle men, called *maistries* or *kanganies*, to recruit workers. These middle men may not have openly purchased slaves in the way that Assen Ally did, but by using financial advances, inflated promises of high wages and flattering descriptions of plantation life to encourage impoverished labourers to sign up, their tactics were 'deceptive at best, coercive at worst'. Moreover, once on the plantation, as Baak points out, 'the mobilised labourers were immobilised … Although freed from landlords and moneylenders, they were enslaved by their new employers.'[133] Indebtedness was encouraged, through charges for subsistence, small cash advances and through the tacit sanction of drinking, gambling, etc. As long as the labourers were indebted, *kanganies* could force them to work longer hours, work when sick and remain on the plantation beyond their allotted contract period, a situation Baak refers to as 'debt slavery'.[134] Moreover, the British authorities formally reinforced the immobilisation of labour on the plantations when they passed the British Indian Workman's Breach of Contract Act (Act XIII of 1859) (see also Criminal

Breach of Contract Act passed in Travancore in 1865), which gave the employer protection against absconding labourers and allowed them to be forcibly returned to the plantation until their time was expired or their debts discharged. Thus, like Brown's absconding slaves, later indentured plantation workers were kept on site by the full legislative and judicial power of the colonial state.

Concern with controlling labour movement was, of course, a significant feature of debates about slavery in the 1810s and 1820s, with the fear of mass desertion cited as one of the potential hazards of disturbing the status quo. Even those who supported reforming the slave system were keen to keep the potential for long-term, voluntary contracts, which could later be used to keep labour tied to the land, even while they were initially touted as providing options for mobility: 'Any person should still be at liberty to contract for a given sum to labour for a term of years, or for life', the Board of Revenue believed, adding, 'Such contracts should be in writing and be binding on the individual who executes it only, not upon his wife or children.' Slaves, it was argued, should be declared competent to possess and dispose of their own property without interference from their master, and they should be liberated if their master failed to provide them with wholesome food and support throughout their lives, including in times of sickness and infirmity, and to be transferred to another owner if mistreated. The slaves should also have the power to purchase their liberty at the price for which it was forfeited.[135] Suggestions for ameliorating slavery, then, seem to imply a shift not to free labour, but to other forms of 'unfree' labour, not dissimilar to indenture. Here the distinction Tom Brass has outlined is useful:

> Like chattel slavery, such relationships entail the loss on the part of a debtor and/or his or her kinsfolk of the right to sell their labour-power at prevailing free market rates during the period of bondage. Unlike chattel slavery, however, where the *person* of the slave is itself the subject of an economic transaction, in the case of a bonded, convict, contract or indentured labourer it is the latter's *labour-power* which is bought, sold, and controlled without the consent of its owner. Hence the frequent conflation of these arrangements with, the free wage relation, notwithstanding the fact that while a free wage labourer may personally dispose of his or her own labour-power (by selling it to whomsoever s/he wishes, or withdrawing from the labour market altogether), neither a chattel slave nor a bonded/convict/contract/indentured labourer possesses this right. All the latter may appear in the free labour market, therefore, but not as autonomous sellers of their own labour-power.[136]

Conclusion

For British colonial observers, Indian agricultural slavery was characterised by its inherent immobility. Discussing the conditions of the *dher* caste, J. G. Ravenshaw noted that their service was conditional on certain obligations on the part of the master being met, and that

> [a] master cannot make a traffic in them; that is, he cannot put them up to public sale, or transport them either by sea or land, to any place where there are not people of their own caste, as which is confined to Canara … Such is their strong and rooted attachment to the place of their nativity known, that no person ever thinks of purchasing and taking one away to a distant place, even in the country.[137]

The ability of slave-owners to keep their low-caste labourers on the land is noted by E. Kathleen Gough, who says of the functioning of caste in Tanjore, 'A truant Pallan could be returned to his master by force and, except by agreement between the two landlord communities, could not change the village of his alliance'.[138] Such restrictions on spatial and social mobility were seen as the defining characteristics of Indian agricultural slavery that separated them from both trafficked chattel slaves and later indentured labourers. Significantly, this idea of immobility as an essential condition of 'traditional' bondage was invoked by Brown himself, who tacitly acknowledged that he limited his labourers' movement, but maintained 'it is true that they are not at liberty to go where they please, but they did not possess that liberty before they came here, nor would they now were they anywhere else'. Moreover, he commented that the European as well as the native local authorities had been instructed to assist him, 'and even to restore slaves who had run away, and returned to their homes (without any orders to inquire the reason of their absconding).'[139] Brown was clearly taking to himself the powers to reclaim runaway labourers exercised by slave-owners, and which would later also be granted to plantation owners over their indentured labourers. Whereas the latter would be justified on the grounds of contract, however, here Brown seeks to normalise his labour relations in the context of local practice rather than on imported western capitalist relations and their corollaries.

Notes

1 The extremely long and detailed correspondence that took place relating to this case can be found in *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 125 (1828) (henceforth PP 1828), pp. 560 ff.

2 Paul E. Baak, 'About Enslaved Ex-Slaves, Uncaptured Contract Coolies and Unfreed Freedmen: Some Notes About and Labour in the Context of Plantation Development in Southwest India, Early Sixteenth Century-Mid 1990s', *Modern Asian Studies*, 33.1, 1999, p. 127.

3 Ibid., p. 128.

4 David Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* 15.3 (1981): 666. The level of cash crop production in the first half of the nineteenth century was considerably lower than was expected or desired, despite some promising experiments with cotton, indigo, cinnamon, cloves and spices. Sugar was produced in this region, but primarily for domestic consumption: the bulk of India's limited sugar exports came from Bengal rather than Madras Presidency.

5 Ibid., p. 667.

6 Ravi Ahuja, 'Labour Relations in an Early Colonial Context: Madras, *c.*1750–1800', *Modern Asian Studies* 36.4 (2002): 824.

7 Michael Anderson, 'India, 1858–1930: The Illusion of Free Labor', in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 424.

8 PP 1828, p. 596.

9 Dharma Kumar, 'Caste and Landlessness in South India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4.3 (1962): 340.

10 PP 1828, p. 596–7.

11 Ibid., p. 597.

12 Ibid., p. 598.

13 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 810.

14 Kumar, 'Caste and Landlessness in South India', p. 341.

15 Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807), p. 372.

16 Kumar, 'Caste and Landlessness in South India', p. 341.

17 PP 1828, p. 575.

18 Ahuja, 'Labour Relations', p. 799.

19 Thomas Hervey Baber, *An Account of the Slave Population in the Western Peninsula of India … As Contained in the Replies of T. H. Baber to the Questions Referred to Him by the Commissioners for the Affairs of India* (London: Parbury, Allen and Co., 1833).

20 PP 1828, p. 597.

21 *Slavery in India*, Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons), 128 (1834) (henceforth PP 1834), p. 13.

22 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Socety', p. 659.

23 PP 1828, p. 577.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., pp. 653–5.

26 Ibid., p. 729.

27 Preface to Baber, *An Account of the Slave Population in the Western Peninsula of India.*

28 Nancy Gardner Cassels, 'Social Legislation under the Company Raj: The Abolition of Slavery Act V 1843', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 11.1 (1988): 65.

29 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society', p. 668.

30 Benedicte Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India in the Nineteenth Century* (Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1967), p. 106.
31 Parliamentary Papers, session 1837–8 (215), vol. XLVIII (henceforth PP 1837–8), p. 22.
32 PP 1828, p. 300. Richards does not make it clear what crops these slaves were involved in cultivating, although the Bihar region in which Ramghur was located was known for the production of opium as well as rice, barley, wheat, betel-nut, indigo, sugar and essences.
33 Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Jan Breman, *Labour Bondage in West India: From Past to Present* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
34 PP 1828, p. 901.
35 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society', p. 661.
36 Ibid., p. 652.
37 Ibid., p. 654.
38 Ibid.
39 PP 1828, p. 591.
40 Michael H. Fisher, *Beyond the Three Seas: Travellers' Tales of Mughal India* (New Delhi: Random House, 2007), p. 189.
41 J. A. Dubois, *Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India, and of Their Institutions Civil and Religious; Translated from the French Manuscript* (London: 1817), p. 455.
42 Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*.
43 PP 1828, p. 549.
44 Ibid., p. 815.
45 Ibid., p. 818.
46 Ibid., p. 823.
47 Ibid., p. 836.
48 Dharma Kumar, 'Colonialism, Bondage and Caste in British India', in Martin Allen Klein (ed.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 112.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 'In Malabar and Canara, where the land is very generally divided, and occupied as distinct properties, the labourer is the personal slave of the proprietor, and is sold and mortgaged by him, independently of his lands. In the Tamil country, where land is of less value, and belongs more frequently to a community than to an individual; the labourer is understood to be the slave rather of the soil than of its owner, and is seldom sold or mortgaged, except along with the land to which he is attached; but in Telingana, where it is difficult now to trace the remains of private property in land, this class of people is considered free.' Board of Revenue, PP 1828, p. 805.
52 Kumar, 'Caste and Landlessness in South India', pp. 339–40.
53 PP 1828, p. 914.
54 Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage*, p. 81.
55 Kumar, 'Caste and Landlessness in South India', p. 342.
56 PP 1828, p. 816.
57 Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 6.
58 Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, p. 42.

59 Dick Kooiman, 'Conversion from Slavery to Plantation Labour: Christian Mission in South India, 19th Century', *Social Scientist* 19.8/9 (1991): 59.
60 PP 1828, p. 846.
61 Ibid., p. 871.
62 Ibid., pp. 548–52.
63 Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, p. 370.
64 PP 1828, p. 833.
65 Ibid., p. 898.
66 Howard Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 169–70.
67 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 6.
68 See Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).
69 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society', p. 653.
70 See Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).
71 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law*, p. 7.
72 PP 1828, p. 846.
73 Ibid., p. 921.
74 Ibid., p. 565.
75 Ibid., p. 570.
76 Ibid., p. 580
77 Ibid., pp. 579–80.
78 Ibid., p. 551.
79 Ibid., p. 550.
80 Ibid. Interestingly, Ravenshaw also argued that *dher* enlistment was bad for the army, as they made indifferent recruits, being so attached to their locality that 'all the prize money a soldier ever gained' would not tempt them to leave it with the corps, and as a result the army would lose its recruits.
81 Ibid., p. 564.
82 Ibid., p. 840.
83 Ibid., p. 839.
84 Ibid., p. 877.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p. 921.
87 Ibid., pp. 816–17.
88 Ibid., p. 846.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., p. 872.
91 Ibid., p. 837.
92 Ibid., p. 922.
93 Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage*, p. 94.
94 Ibid., p. 77.
95 Ibid., p. 94.
96 PP 1828, p. 850.
97 Ibid., pp. 847 ff.
98 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society', p. 662.
99 PP 1828, p. 845.
100 Ibid., p. 927.
101 Ibid., p. 922.

102 Ibid.
103 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society', p. 660.
104 PP 1828, p. 920.
105 Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage*, p. 95.
106 Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, p. 370.
107 Ibid., p. 371.
108 PP 1828, p. 872.
109 Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage*, p. 96.
110 PP 1828, p. 909. The Court of Directors specifically wanted to know about 'the treatment to which they are liable, the habits of their masters with respect to them, the kind of life to which they are doomed, the sort of title by which the property in them is claimed, the price which they bear, and more especially the surest and safest means of ultimately effecting their emancipation.'
111 Ibid., p. 911.
112 Crispin Bates, *Subalterns and Raj: South Asia since 1600* (London: Routledge, 2007).
113 PP 1828, p. 837.
114 Ibid., p. 844.
115 Ibid., p. 921.
116 Ibid., p. 842.
117 Ibid., p. 909.
118 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society', p. 663.
119 PP 1828, p. 840.
120 Ibid., p. 922.
121 Ibid., p. 914.
122 Ibid., p. 897.
123 Ibid.
124 Baak, 'About Enslaved Ex-Slaves'; Kooiman, 'Conversion from Slavery', p. 63.
125 Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electroal Politics in Assam, 1826–1947*, cited by Ranajit Das Gupta, 'Plantation Labour in Colonial India', in E. Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein and Tom Brass (eds), *Plantations, Proletarians, and Peasants in Colonial Asia* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), p. 182.
126 Barbara Evans, 'From Agricultural Bondage to Plantation Contract: A Continuity of Experience in Southern India, 1860–1947', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 13.2 (1990): 45.
127 Gupta, 'Plantation Labour', p. 173.
128 Ibid., p. 174.
129 Ibid., p. 175.
130 Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society', p. 662.
131 Cited in Baak, 'About Enslaved Ex-Slaves', p. 130.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid., p. 135.
134 Ibid.
135 PP 1828, p. 912.
136 Tom Brass, 'Some Observations on Unfree Labour, Capitalist Restructuring, and Deproletarianization', *International Review of Social History* 39.2 (1994): 257.
137 PP 1828, p. 563.
138 E. Kathleen Gough, *Caste in a Tanjore Village*, cited in Hjejle, *Slavery and Agricultural Bondage*, p. 85.
139 PP 1828, p. 597.

IV

Imagined Slaveries

Introduction: Evangelical Connections

In December 1800, Baptist missionary Revd William Carey received a letter from evangelical EIC army chaplain and future vice-provost of Fort William College, Revd Claudius Buchanan, asking for his advice about the best way to put a stop to *sati* in India. Recording the event in his diary, Carey's colleague William Ward remarked that 'Mr. Buchanan says that he is as anxious about this as Mr. Wilberforce is about the slave trade.'[1] Buchanan later provided Wilberforce with information about the number of *satis* in Bengal, gleaned from Carey and Ward's 1803 survey of the rite's prevalence in the area around Calcutta, while Wilberforce in turn referenced Buchanan in his speech on India in the House of Commons in 1813.[2] Ward's brief diary entry, and the connections and correspondences that radiate out from it, provide a glimpse of the complex personal interconnections that linked evangelical EIC employees, missionaries and abolitionists in Britain and India within wider webs of colonial humanitarianism: 'the complex cartography of philanthropic connection', to use Lambert and Lester's phrase, through which information and ideas about the colonies were constructed and transmitted in evangelical circles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[3] As Brian Pennington notes, few men at the turn of the nineteenth century had as much influence on how British Christians imagined India's Hindu population as William Ward and Claudius Buchanan, both of whom were prolific in their literary productions condemning Hindu religion and society.[4] William Wilberforce's name, of course, was not only synonymous with the evangelical crusade against slavery, but was also closely connected with the campaign to open India to missionary activity. All three men, as well as many others with whom they had direct and indirect connections, were active in propagating information about the benighted spiritual state of India's population, and in debating the nature and extent of Britain's duty towards its colonial subjects in the East.

Ward's diary extract is just a fragment, but it raises important questions

about how evangelical Britons evaluated their responsibilities and priorities in the sphere of colonial philanthropic reform. Why, for example, was *sati*, which affected less than 1 per cent of widows in Bengal, deemed a horror comparable to the slave trade, when the actual existence of slave-trafficking and of domestic and agricultural slavery on the subcontinent went largely unacknowledged by either missionaries or abolitionists?[5] For, despite widespread public interest in both anti-slavery and the uplift of the Indian population, the existence of socio-economic forms of bondage in India received at best a limited and ambivalent treatment within wider evangelical debates about colonial reform. This part of the book turns its attention away from EIC experiences and policies in India and towards metropolitan debates on slavery and colonial social reform. By exploring how ideas about Indian slavery functioned within wider evangelical debates spanning various sites of empire, it demonstrates that while the existence of various coercive labour practices in India was elided within metropolitan debates on empire, they were replaced with figurative discursive formations that constructed the Indian's soul as eternally enslaved, but his labour as fundamentally free.

The first two parts of this book have charted the history of EIC encounters with slavery and slave-trading in India, exploring how their policy on and representations of different forms of 'unfree' labour were shaped by the economic, political and pragmatic imperatives of their rule as it evolved across the subcontinent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It has argued that although EIC attitudes to Indian slavery were broadly underpinned by anti-slavery ideals, their policy was both pragmatic and contingent on local circumstances and political considerations. In the process it has shown that although historians may now question the extent to which certain Indian labour relations fit with modern typologies of slavery, in the early nineteenth century, EIC officials were actively debating various forms of servitude and dependence in India using that vocabulary. Much of the content of these colonial debates on slavery in India was available in the public domain by the late 1820s, yet knowledge of its existence did not significantly impact on the evangelical imagination in Britain until nearly a decade after the Emancipation Act, which began the process of dismantling slavery in other parts of the British Empire.[6] Indeed, the omission of Indian slavery from the 1833 Act made little immediate impression on the evangelical public who had supported humanitarian reform in Britain's colonial possessions through their involvement with both abolitionism and missionary enterprise. East Indian slavery was lost in the euphoria of success in the West Indies, when for many 'The great object had been achieved, the battle was over.'[7] It was not until the early 1840s that abolitionists revisited the issue of slavery in India, presenting it as a newly revealed scandal for the evangelical public in Britain. As missionary and abolitionist campaigner

William Adam put it in a series of public letters to Thomas Fowell Buxton, in 1840, 'In England the subject is not known or publicly recognised as one affecting the welfare of India or the honour of Great Britain; and it even seems to be generally assumed, since the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, that it has ceased to exist throughout the British dominions.'[8]

David Brion Davis's argument that inadequate and unreliable information, and the 'peculiar'[9] nature of East Indian slavery, blinded anti-slavery leaders to its existence echoes the words of Adam and other abolitionists, but offers at best only a partial explanation for the absence of Indian slavery from earlier evangelical debates. Although some misinformation certainly circulated, relatively reliable sources, including the voluminous Parliamentary Papers on East Indian slavery, published by the House of Commons, were in the public domain more than a decade before Adam brought the issue to Buxton's attention. Indeed, concerns about the nature of Indian labour conditions, as well as her society at large, haunted the peripheries of abolitionist and evangelical debate throughout the 1820s. If abolitionists were, as Seymour Drescher asserts, committed to creating 'one world of labour relations', and believed, as Wilberforce did, that 'the principles of justice are immutable in their nature and universal in their application', their ambivalent reaction to Indian slavery requires further explanation. The following chapters will argue that any such explanation must link attitudes to different forms of slavery, in different parts of the world, to wider constructions of and debates about Britain's imperial future.[10] Debates about the state of society and systems of labour in both the West and East Indies interacted to inform emerging nineteenth-century ideas about the economic and moral dimensions of empire. These discursive formations connected the East and West Indies and allow them to define themselves in relation to each other. They also, however, created a context for the marginalisation of actual acts of enslavement and exploitation within discourses on India, as the subcontinent was reimagined as the new free-labour alternative to the old imperial system.

Brion Davis has argued that the shift to anti-slavery ideologies in the late eighteenth century saw a reimagining of the basic paradigm of social geography into a 'free-world' norm and a 'slave world' aberration, which juxtaposed metropolitan freedom against the 'un-British' slave society of West Indies.[11] It is difficult, however, to place the EIC's Indian territories within this wider imaginative framework, as India needed simultaneously to fulfil at least two competing roles. First, India needed to function as an enslaved, non-Christian 'other' that was the legitimate subject of colonial domination and the recipient of Christian emancipation. Secondly, it had to function as a 'free-world' alternative to the West Indies where imperial commodity production could take place without the scourge of slavery. Evangelical attitudes towards Indian forms of bondage embodied

this fundamental contradiction, as ideas about Indian social and religious enslavement, as developed and filtered back to Britain by Protestant missionaries of various denominations, intersected with abolitionist (and East India trading interests') hopes for her future commercial role in a post-emancipation empire. These sometimes conflicting contexts resulted in an uneven evangelical discourse in which the Indian peasant was at once a poor, benighted 'heathen', labouring under the oppressive weight of a cruel, enslaving socio-religious system, and a potentially happy and industrious wage-earner, the epitome of the 'free-labour' ideal, whose utilisation would undermine the economic foundations of the slave system in the West Indies. The following chapters explore the intellectual, ideological and strategic factors that informed evangelical attitudes to India society and Indian labour in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in order to show how the existence of actual domestic and agricultural slavery in India was subsumed within wider metropolitan debates about the nature, focus and responsibilities of empire.

Missionaries and abolitionists

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Britain saw the emergence of an enthusiastic, popularist and proselytising form of evangelical Christianity that emphasised the importance of the individual conversion experience and sought to extend the blessing of divine revelation to the 'unlettered, the unwashed and the unchurched' at home and around the globe.[12] As Ernest Howse points out, this reflected a 'new doctrine of responsibility toward the unprivileged', which gained its moral force from evangelical assumptions about the value of the individual human soul.[13] The abolitionist crusade, the missionary movement, the spread of Sunday schools, the distribution of religious tracts and campaigns for the improvement of public morality and the uplift and Christianisation of the working poor were all part of this wider evangelical awakening, which mobilised both aristocratic patronage and popular enthusiasm in support of its causes.[14] At roughly the same time, the upsurge in British imperial expansion in the late eighteenth century meant that political and public attention was increasingly focused on the 'East India question', and a 'prolonged battle of opinions raged' over the nature of the relationship between the EIC, the Crown, parliament and the British nation in the context of extensive new territorial acquisitions.[15] These debates reached their peak in the 1780s with the impeachment and show trial of Warren Hastings and coincided with the gathering momentum of the anti-slavery movement, bringing questions of the nature, meaning and focus

of empire under greater public scrutiny and prompting what Andrew Porter refers to as a 'many-sided reassessment of Britain's overseas responsibilities'.[16]

'Poverty, slavery and colonial expansion', John Marriott maintains, 'emerged almost simultaneously as matters of urgent concern' within the evangelical public sphere.[17] The result was a cross-fertilisation of ideas between the various movements for social reform at home and overseas, leading to a shared discursive terrain in which Britain's labouring poor could be likened to heathens, and heathens in their turn were likened to slaves.[18] As late as 1861, Henry Mayhew noted that working-class notions of morality 'agree strangely … with those of many savage tribes' and Susan Thorne concludes that it was 'almost impossible for evangelicals to describe, and arguably even to think about, the labouring poor, without comparing them in some way to empire's heathen races'.[19] Evangelical attitudes to Indian society and religion, as well as their sense of purpose and duty towards Britain's Indian subjects, were thus deeply embedded in wider metropolitan and colonial constructions that linked the labouring poor in Britain's new industrial cities, the benighted heathen in her colonies and the African slave on her West Indian plantations as alike in need of legislative protection and Christian salvation.[20] As Brian Pennington points out, within the wider providentialist narrative of evangelical imperialism, 'spiritual awakening was linked to material improvement and reformed morality to social and political stability'.[21] Evangelical accounts of India's Hindu population made extensive use of metaphors of slavery and bondage when discussing the nature of their social and religious oppression, and Ward's above-mentioned comparison between Buchanan's anxiety over *sati* and Wilberforce's commitment to abolitionism is indicative of the wider shared social, political and ideological landscape in which both missionaries and abolitionists functioned. Missionary depictions of Indian society, religion and culture were influenced by this collective intellectual framework, which shared key points of reference with other evangelical and humanitarian movements and made use of similar discursive strategies and techniques, while abolitionists and reformers were equally influenced by missionary publications and propaganda in fashioning their images of Indian society.

The great upsurge in Protestant missionary activity in Britain, with its interest in saving souls and reforming human society in far-off lands, coincided with the emergence of the abolitionist campaign and drew its strength and support from the same mix of evangelical Anglicans and dissenters. With the exception of the 'sporadic and haphazard' endeavours of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK, founded in 1699) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG, founded in 1701), proselytisation overseas had initially been the preserve of the Catholic powers of France, Spain and Portugal, or Danish and German

Lutherans.[22] The last decades of the eighteenth century, however, saw an increasing interest in missionary activity among both British dissenters and members of the Anglican Church, prompting a spate of publications discussing the desirability and feasibility of missionary enterprise. In 1782, Thomas Coke, an associate of John Wesley, published his *Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathen*, which resulted in the dispatch of Methodist missionaries to the West Indies in 1787, while in 1784 Melville Horne published a collection of *Letters on Missions*, which called for collaboration across denominational lines to further overseas evangelisation. In 1787, evangelical Anglicans and EIC employees David Brown and Charles Grant produced a *Proposal for Establishing a Protestant Mission in Bengal and Bihar*, which was followed in 1792 by Grant's more famous *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*. In the same year, William Carey produced his *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, and the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) was formed.[23] Further organisations followed, including the non-denominational London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1795, the Scottish Missionary Society in 1796 and the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799. The Wesleyan Methodists Missionary Society (WMMS) was formed between 1814 and 1818, and the Church of Scotland Mission Boards in 1825. All these groups were active in India during the early nineteenth century, funding their missions overseas through the contributions of metropolitan subscribers who were moved by a mixture of religious enthusiasm and humanitarian concern to relieve the temporal and eternal suffering of those distant British subjects currently excluded from divine grace.

The origins of humanitarian sensibility in the late eighteenth century have been the subject of considerable historical debate in the three decades since Michel Foucault influentially destabilised ideas of humanitarianism as a transcendental moral force by emphasising the elements of 'social control' involved in prison reform.[24] Controversies over the roots of anti-slavery, in particular, pre-date even Foucault, having been the subject of debate ever since 1944, when Eric Williams famously argued that economic self-interest was the real force that motivated the apparently benevolent reformers.[25] Although Williams's thesis has now largely been revised, it is unlikely that W. E. H. Lecky's assertion of 1876 that the British anti-slavery campaign was 'among the three or four perfectly virtuous acts recorded in the history of nations' will ever again be accepted at face value by historians.[26] Instead, subsequent studies of abolition have increasingly focused on problematising accusations of conscious self-interest on the part of the abolitionists with more complex discussions of the impact of capitalism, class interest and social change on the movement.[27] Thomas Haskell goes further, suggesting a

connection between the development of the capitalist market and humanitarianism that transcends the conscious, or even unconscious, functioning of class interest. He argues, instead, that capitalism created a 'new moral universe', as emerging global networks of investment and trade created fresh understandings of causal processes within worldwide circuits of capital, commodity and labour, which 'extended moral responsibility beyond its former limits' and provided the preconditions for the emergence of a new humanitarian sensibility that saw suffering overseas as a legitimate and pressing object of evangelical concern.[28] Increasing exposure to information, images and ideas about conditions in distant lands, or, indeed, among the labouring poor at home, thus helped to change the 'moral compass' of society, creating a sense of responsibility even among those who were not directly affected.[29]

Evangelical organisations like the Eclectic Society, Anti-Slavery Society and the various missionary societies, as well as other more secular movements interested in the conditions of empire, all actively disseminated information and built support for colonial reform through innumerable pamphlets, magazines, meetings, speaking tours and lectures.[30] The volume of production does not imply homogeneity of interpretation, however. As Lambert and Lester point out, British imperial imaginations in the nineteenth century were 'unevenly globalised': linked by 'distanced chains of cause and effect' that shared and transmitted ideas around the sites of empire, but did not always do so in a uniform or consistent way.[31] As is indicated by the relative lack of information on East Indian slavery when compared either to West Indian slavery or to other East Indian 'problems' such as *sati*, some issues and some colonial spaces received more metropolitan attention than others, and missionary and abolitionist publications were often selective about what material to print, or what issues to research.

Nor were evangelical organisations, though important, the only arbiters of what information would reach their various publics. As Catherine Hall points out, Britons

> learned about the colonial order of things through a multiplicity of forms. There was no consolidated vision of the empire, but rather a cacophony of sounds: abolitionists contending with 'scientific racists', would-be colonisers competing with the more cautious voices of those who saw empire as an unnecessary expense, exhibitors rivalling missionaries in the advertising of their wares.[32]

The popular press, for example, often carried information on empire, as well as accounts of abolitionist and missionary activities, in Britain and overseas. This blurred the boundaries between the 'evangelical public sphere'

(epitomised by social reform organisations, anti-slavery and missionary societies, churches and meeting houses) and the mainstream of British society, and drew people of various class backgrounds into 'the wider political processes of state, nation and empire'.[33]

That a spirit of co-operation existed between the various missionary societies, the anti-slavery campaign and the organisations for social uplift in Britain is perhaps not surprising given that 'the same agencies were involved, and that they drew on the same intellectual resources and vocabularies'.[34] Leaders of the anti-slavery movement, especially Wilberforce's Clapham Sect associates, were also involved in movements for evangelisation abroad and reform of the condition of Britain's labouring classes at home: many of the same figures sat on the individual organising committees of these various charitable organisations. They were early subscribers to missionary societies, including the BMS, and later the CMS, and a regular correspondence circulated between them about the missionary project.[35] Many of 'the friends of the Negro', as Hall puts it, 'were also the friends of mission'.[36] Moreover, several missionaries who went to India had been active abolitionists before leaving Britain. William Carey repeatedly criticised 'the accursed Slave Trade' and supported the 'noble effort' to abolish it, praising those who boycotted West Indian sugar in protest at the 'iniquitous manner' in which it was produced.[37] Similarly, Carey's colleague at Serampore, William Ward, had been overtly involved in radical journalism and politics in Britain, and had used his editorship of the *Hull Advertiser* to publicise the cause of abolition.[38] This is not to suggest a straightforward correlation between the missionary and anti-slavery movements, however, for although they overlapped significantly and extensively, the latter was the much larger faction and drew on a wider social base—not all abolitionists were committed Christians.[39] Moreover, although most were ideologically opposed to slavery, some missionary societies, especially those that sent representatives to work amongst the slaves on British West Indian plantations, found it strategically necessary to dissociate themselves from political abolitionism in order to gain the trust and co-operation of the planters in their proselytising work. These organisations had to manage their public connections with the leaders of the anti-slavery movement cautiously: as Mary Turner points out, they 'carefully distinguished between Wilberforce the politician and Wilberforce the philanthropist and elevated the need to save souls above all civil and political questions'.[40] Prominent Methodist abolitionists in parliament initially kept anonymous their subscriptions to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to avoid undermining its supposed neutrality, while new recruits to the Moravian, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Baptist missions in the West Indies were all instructed to avoid political discussions of any kind and warned not to 'intermeddle with politics'.[41] The

BMS Committee even instructed its missionaries departing for Jamaica to 'endeavour by a respectful demeanour to recommend yourself and the gospel to the white inhabitants of the Island'.[42] Those who would not keep silent on the subject of slavery were summarily dismissed from the Society's service.[43] Thus, despite strong anti-slavery traditions within their churches, Baptist and Wesleyan missionary societies maintained strategic neutrality on the issue of abolitionism, although this was sometimes infringed by their publications in Britain. When the home committee of the WMMS finally came out in favour of the campaign against slavery, in 1825, it was much to the distress of missionaries in the West Indies, who found suggestions of anti-slavery bias greatly complicated their attempts to placate an apprehensive and hostile planter class.

Missionaries in India faced their own problems with a suspicious colonial government, which feared that immoderate missionary zeal would lead to discontent and unrest among the devout Hindu population. As a result, missionaries were initially debarred from entering EIC territories and their relationship with the colonial state remained ambivalent, even after this ban was lifted in 1813.[44] Moreover, although partly rehabilitated in the nineteenth century as more ethical than the West Indian slave system, there were long-standing tensions within evangelical circles about the morality of the EIC's actions in India. 'From West and East alike flowed luxury and potential corruption,' Peter Marshall remarks; 'the West Indian planter and the East Indian nabob were reviled as being self indulgent and rapacious and were thought to threaten traditional English virtues in the communities among which they settled.'[45] Some viewed the EIC as a harbinger of economic and imperial progress, but others saw it as a more sinister, even scandalous, presence in the East.[46] In 1786, Edmund Burke, who also voted against the slave trade, attacked EIC 'oppression and cruelty' and the 'arbitrary and despotic power' wielded by Warren Hastings.[47] Many of the leading lights of the abolitionist campaign agreed. William Cowper, whose anti-slavery poems are well known, believed that the EIC 'Build factories with blood, conducting trade/At the sword's point, and dyeing the white robe/Of innocent commercial Justice red.'[48] By the 1800s, however, after the acquittal of Hastings and the reform of the EIC administration under Cornwallis, the Company began to reposition itself as a benevolent and legitimate ruler that extended the limits of civil society and brought security of property and impartiality of justice.[49]

Questions over the nature of EIC rule in India persisted in some quarters well into the nineteenth century. In 1821, Tory radical and long-time critic of the EIC, William Cobbett, responded to abolitionist calls for the equalisation of trade conditions between the East and West Indies by declaring,

> The whole of our India, as we call it, is enslaved. All are slaves of the thing called the Company, from the highest to the lowest … To rob the poor devils of almost their very teeth, to plunder them of everything short of the bear means of existing … to harass incessantly, to take composition for even life itself; to commit on men, in short, all sorts of extortions, violences and cruelties, with perfect impunity is, according to you, to leave them 'free men' still … That India is a country of slavery, of plunder, of cruelties elsewhere unheard of we all know, if we know anything beyond the limits of this Island. The abject, the vile slavery of India is notorious. The cruelties inflicted on the poor timid creatures of that country have wrung throughout the world.[50]

In the late 1830s, the members of the British India Society launched a similarly damning attack on the impact of EIC misrule, albeit with somewhat different motives. Indeed, missionaries and evangelicals continued to critique the EIC administration throughout the early nineteenth century, especially regarding its tolerance of 'heathen' rites and practices, and promoted wider debates about Britain's moral and material duties towards her East Indian subjects. They became gradually less sceptical about the overall benefits of British rule, however, especially after India was opened to both missionary activity and private trade in 1813. Indeed, by the 1820s, the idea of a benevolent British presence in India had become ideologically important for an abolitionist movement that saw India and her vast reserves of manpower as a potential ethical and economical alternative to the West Indian slave system.

The development of anti-slavery sentiment and missionary enterprise were both bound up in complex ways with commercial imperial expansion and territorial acquisition. As Lambert and Lester point out, the philanthropic dimensions of imperial expansion were co-constitutive with the more overtly exploitative ones, existing in an uneasy relationship with the coercive power of the colonial state that was sometimes antagonistic, sometimes complimentary.[51] Colonial philanthropists, of course, believed in the potential of imperial expansion to transform the world and its people, and as a result sought to project their own specific world view (e.g., Christianity) and reacted against what they perceived to be abuses by other colonial interests or authorities.[52] These projections and reactions were selective, however, as specific issues or concerns were elevated or marginalised according not to their scale, or impact on local populations, but on the basis of their utility within wider evangelical discourse. Thus, the issue of *sati*, which affected only a small handful of widows in Bengal, but resonated provocatively with a range of contemporary evangelical concerns, became a national cause célèbre, while the actual enslavement of hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of Indian men, women and children was largely either ignored, or excused. The

following chapters will explore these ideas in the contexts of the missionary movement, pre-1833 abolitionism and the debates over Indian slavery and Indian indenture that took place in the late 1830 and 1840s.

Notes

1 William Ward's Journal, Monday, 22 Dec. 1800, Baptist Missionary Archives, Regents Park College, Oxford.

2 In this speech, Wilberforce admitted that Buchanan's account of the state of Indian society was doubted by some, but emphasised that he considered Buchanan to be entirely reliable. William Wilberforce, *Substance of the Speeches of William Wilberforce, Esq. On the Clause in the East India Bill for Promoting the Religious Instruction and Moral Improvement of the Natives of the British Dominions in India, on the 22[n]d of June, and the 1st and 12th of July, 1813* (London: John Hatchard; J. Butterworth; T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1813). Wilberforce also references Buchanan, this time without apology, in William Wilberforce, 'Letter to a Friend on the Duty of Great Britain to Disseminate Christianity in India', *Christian Observer* (May 1812): 263–4.

3 For a discussion of the overlapping, intersecting and sometimes conflicting 'bundles of networks' that made up the 'geographies of colonial philanthropy', see David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography* 28: 3 (2004): 320–41.

4 Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 85.

5 EIC records kept between 1818 and 1829 suggest that between 500 and 1,000 widows were burned annually in British administered Bengal. For a discussion of the demographics of *sati* in nineteenth-century Bengal, see Anand A. Yang, 'Whose Sati?: Widow Burning in Early 19th Century India', *Journal of Women's History* 1.2 (1989): 8–33.

6 The main source of information on Indian slavery were the Parliamentary Papers on East Indian Slavery (*Slavery in India: Return to an Address of the Honourable House of Commons, Dated 13th April 1826*), published by the House of Commons in 1828 (further volumes appeared in 1834, 1838 and 1844). These were reviewed in the press, including several articles in the *Asiatic Journal*, and formed the basis of James Peggs's substantial treatment of Indian slavery in his *India's Cries to British Humanity: Relative to the Suttee, Infanticide, British Connexion with Idolatry, Ghaut Murders, and Slavery in India*, 2nd edn (London: Seely and Son, 1830).

7 David Brion Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823–1833', *Journal of Negro History* 46.3 (1961): 169.

8 William Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India; in a Series of Letters to T. F. Buxton, Esq.* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1840), p. 6.

9 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 155. See Introduction to Part I, above.

10 Seymour Drescher, 'Abolitionist Expectations: Britain', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 45–6.

11 Cited in Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies', p. 329.

12 Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, p. 23.

13 Cited in Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies', p. 323.

14 Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, p. 23.

15 Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 4.

16 A. N. Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 39. For more on the trial of Warren Hastings, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

17 John Marriott, *The Other Empire: Metropolis, India and Progress in the Colonial Imagination* (Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 11.

18 Ibid.

19 Cited in Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, p. 25.

20 Ibid., p. 24.

21 Ibid.

22 Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 24.

23 Ibid.

24 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

25 Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

26 Cited in Thomas L. Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1', *American Historical Review* 90.2 (1985): 340. Williams's economic arguments are convincingly disproved in Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

27 Roger Anstey, for example, has attempted a rehabilitation of the moral character of the abolitionists, while David Brion Davis provides a sophisticated analysis of the unconscious relationship between anti-slavery and the changing social and economic relationships brought about by industrialisation and the growth of capitalism. Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*.

28 Haskell, 'Capitalism', p. 357.

29 Jamie L. Bronstein, *Caught in the Machinery: Workplace Accidents and Injured Workers in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 60.

30 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 276.

31 Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies'.

32 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 274.

33 Ibid.

34 Marriott, *The Other Empire*, p. 33.

35 See Porter, *Religion versus Empire?*, p. 41.

36 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 310.

37 Brian Stanley, 'Baptists, Anti-Slavery and the Legacy of Imperialism', *Baptist Quarterly* 42 (2007): 228–9.

38 Ibid.

39 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 310.

40 Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Kingston: University of the West Indies, 1998), p. 9.

41 Ibid.
42 Stanley, 'Baptists', p. 288.
43 Lee Compere was dismissed for this reason in 1817. Brian Stanley notes that even William Knibb, who had long privately abhorred slavery, obeyed BMS Committee instructions in this regard, at least until the colonial authorities' savage repression of the slave rebellion of 1831–2, after which he felt obliged to speak out. When Knibb and his colleague James Phillippo returned to England in order to campaign against slavery, they found John Dyer and the BMS Committee still inclined to urge 'prudence and a temperate policy'. Ibid., p. 289.
44 For more on the relationship between missionaries and the EIC, see Ian Copland, 'Christianity as an Arm of Empire: The Ambiguous Case of India under the Company, *c.*1813–1858', *Historical Journal* 49.4 (2006): 1025–54.
45 P. J. Marshall, 'The Moral Swing to the East: British Humanitarianism in India and the West Indies', in K. Ballhatchet and J. Harrison (eds), *East India Company Studies: Papers Presented to Professor Sir Cyril Philips* (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1986), p. 70. For more on ambivalent attitudes to EIC expansion in India, see Tillman W. Nechtman, 'Nabobs Revisited: A Cultural History of British Imperialism and the Indian Question in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain', *History Compass* 4.4 (2006): 645–67; Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips, '"Our Execrable Banditti": Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 16.3 (1984): 225–41; Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*.
46 See Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*.
47 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 70.
48 Cited ibid.
49 Ibid., p. 73.
50 *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* (4 Aug. 1821).
51 Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies', p. 321.
52 Ibid., p. 323.

7

'Satan's Wretched Slaves': Indian Society and the Evangelical Imagination

> In laying the varied but momentous topics contained in this volume before a British public, the author's avowed intention is, to awaken our national sympathies on behalf of the victims and devotees of superstition, whose cause he pleads. Some years since, a few powerful voices roused the slumbering energies of Britain to survey the horrors of the slave trade. In favour of the injured Africans, petitions assailed the legislature from every quarter and, in the memorable year of 1807; the death warrant of this abominable traffic was signed. The shriek of the Hindoo widow from the burning pile, the imploring groans of the afflicted about to be plunged into the Ganges, and the expiring sighs of the miserable victims perishing beneath the wheels of Juggernaut, though uttered in India, are heard in Britain, and solicit the generous aid which Africa experienced at her hands. The cause which the author advocates has a claim upon British humanity and justice scarcely inferior to that which Wilberforce pleaded in the senate, Granville Sharp in our courts of justice, and Clarkson before a sympathizing public, and if followed up with the same spirit of serious perseverance, there can be little doubt that it will ultimately be crowned with similar success.
>
> *Imperial Magazine* 11 (1829), p. 460

So wrote an anonymous reviewer in the *Imperial Magazine* of James Peggs's *India's Cries to British Humanity*, on its first publication in 1829. In this substantial volume, Peggs, who had served as a Baptist missionary in Cuttack, Orissa, in the early 1820s, gave a detailed and critical account of a range of Hindu customs, including *sati*, 'ghaut' murders (the exposure of the sick and dying on the banks of the Ganges) and the festival of Juggernath. Critiquing EIC tolerance of these practices, he encouraged evangelical supporters of the missionary project to put pressure on India's British rulers to end these 'heathen' rites and promote a more Christian form of government there. In a second edition of this work, published a year later in 1830, he added

substantial sections on infanticide and Indian slavery, the latter providing a detailed overview of that institution based on material from the recently published Parliamentary Papers.[1] Peggs's book was an important and influential contribution to a growing body of missionary writing on India; it was widely reviewed and ran to several editions. Moreover, many of its individual chapters were reprinted separately as shorter, cheaper tracts, both before and after their publication as a collection.[2] Yet, while many of the issues that Peggs discussed were already staples of mainstream missionary discourse on India, his inclusion of Indian slavery in 1830 was unusual. Coercive labour conditions on the subcontinent received little attention in the wider missionary press until the late 1830s, when some missionary societies began to report critically on the 'coolie trade'—the migration of indentured Indians that had emerged as an alternative labour source for some of Britain's former slave colonies.[3]

Given the social and cultural importance of anti-slavery sentiment in evangelical circles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the exchange of both ideas and personnel between the abolitionist and missionary movements, the absence of agricultural and domestic slavery from missionary depictions of Indian society and customs requires some explanation. Missionaries were, after all, careful if critical observers of Indian society, whose correspondence with their sponsoring organisations and published works often contained detailed accounts of the customs and practices they encountered, as well as contextual information gleaned from earlier publications. These provided content for the various missionary societies' many metropolitan publications: the missionary magazines, tracts and periodicals that were produced both to report the progress of mission work overseas and to raise funds for it. These publications tended to emphasise those issues that best illustrated the importance of spreading Christianity in distant lands, or that were most likely to awaken sympathy and generosity in their readers. As a result they often dwelt on what they considered to be the negative aspects of Indian social and religious practice. Yet, Indian forms of slavery remained conspicuous primarily by their absence from these accounts. Passing references in the works of Charles Grant, William Ward and Claudius Buchanan, among others, suggest that missionaries and evangelicals in India were aware of the existence of slavery on the subcontinent, but it was not an issue upon which they chose to dwell in any detail, nor did their limited treatments of it filter through into mainstream missionary discourse in Britain.

Information about slavery in India was relatively restricted, in both Britain and India, in the 1810s and 1820s, especially when compared to the wealth of material available on labour practices in the Western hemisphere. James Peggs introduced his own chapters on the subject by noting that 'the nature

and extent of slavery in India are imperfectly understood' and commenting that while numerous works on West Indian slavery were available he was aware of only one small pamphlet on East Indian slavery—ironically, that by West India apologist George Saintsbury.[4] Similarly, the *Friend of India*, a newspaper printed by the Serampore Mission Press run by Peggs's Baptist missionary colleagues, remarked in an article published in 1823 that the lack of metropolitan knowledge of Indian conditions was 'mortifying', and that misinformation circulating about slavery there was based on 'mistakes of the grossest kind, arising wholly from want of information'.[5] Yet a dearth of accurate information on the subject alone is insufficient explanation for the missionary movement's lack of interest in it. Not only is there evidence that the existence of slavery in India was known to missionaries and other Christian observers even before the turn of the nineteenth century, their failure to investigate the issue contrasts sharply with their reactions to *sati*, which had prompted an active and independent enquiry into the rite's prevalence around Calcutta by the Serampore Baptists in 1803, a decade before the EIC state started keeping records of these immolations.

Indications that Christian observers were aware of slavery on the subcontinent date back to the late eighteenth century. EIC Chaplain Revd William Tennant, for example, though not himself of evangelical inclination, noted in 1798 that 'The Hindoo jurisprudence, though celebrated for humanity, pays but small regard to the natural rights of man: it establishes a system of slavery more complex than any yet recorded in history', adding that 'Slaves in India are of many different descriptions, according to the manner in which they have been acquired. No less than fifteen legitimate methods of acquiring slaves are specified in the Eastern code, some of which are peculiar to this quarter of the world.'[6] Tennant undoubtedly drew his fifteen divisions of Hindu slavery from Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's *Code of Gentoo Laws*, in which the same fifteen conditions were listed.[7] Two decades later, William Ward also noted that 'The Hindoos have fifteen kinds of slaves', listing these before commenting that 'In some parts of India children are as much an article of sale as goats or poultry'.[8] In the south of India, the Abbé Dubois's, *Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India* not only noted the existence of caste-based agricultural slavery, but even suggested that it was comparable to West Indian slavery, saying, 'In truth, the Pariahs of India are not to be considered in any other light than as the born slaves of the other tribes. At least there is as great a distance between them and the other casts, as subsists in our colonies between the planters and their slaves.'[9] Dubois had an antagonistic ideological relationship with the more recent Protestant missions in India, of course, but most were familiar with his work. Yet, despite such references, the existence of both domestic and

agricultural slavery in India made little impact on metropolitan missionary discourse in the first part of the nineteenth century.

It has been argued that the qualitative differences between East Indian forms of bondage and chattel slavery in the West Indies are sufficient to explain evangelical silence on the matter.[10] Certainly, some Christian observers reproduced the assumption, common in both EIC discourse and subsequent historiography, that Indian slavery could be judged by the yardstick of the West Indian plantation model, and on that scale be found relatively benign. Tennant, for example, went as far as to assert that 'the domestic slavery of the Hindoos, is attended with less harshness, cruelty, or exhausting labour, than what results from the system among other nations,' and that 'the whole system as it is practised in Hindostan may be defended on principles of humanity.'[11] Similarly, William Ward, in the first version of his monograph on Indian society, published in 1811, commented in a footnote that 'Boys and girls for domestic servitude, are frequently bought and sold in some parts of Bengal. They are always the children of parents who know not how to maintain them; and they are treated, in general, I believe, with great humanity. When they grow up, they frequently run away, and are seldom sought after.'[12] Such assertions were neither universal nor unambiguous, however; Ward himself, in the more overtly critical second edition of his work, published in 1818, qualified his comments by noting that 'Domestic slavery, which is very common in India, however mild, surely demands the reprehension of every individual who has a proper idea of the dignity of human nature.'[13] The Abbé Dubois went even further, believing that African slaves in the West Indian colonies 'lead not a harder life than the Pariahs, and the usage of both is equally severe.'[14] Thus, although the prevailing idea that Indian slavery was less brutal than that of the West Indies goes some way to explaining the lack of urgency with which the issue was treated, it does not fully account for its omission from missionary discourse.

Other explanations usually put forward by historians of abolitionism to explain evangelical disengagement from the issue of slavery in India are equally unsatisfactory in the missionary context. Howard Temperley's argument, for example, that because Indian slavery was an indigenous institution it did not stir the same sense of national guilt as the transatlantic trade may resonate with justifications put forward by the abolitionists themselves, but is less convincing in the context of missionaries, who consistently campaigned for the reform of other 'indigenous' practices equally removed from direct colonial responsibility.[15] Suggestions that Indian slavery was protected by EIC guarantees of social and religious neutrality are also inapplicable to missionaries, who were critical of this policy and urged the EIC government to be a more active social reformer.

More convincing is the suggestion that missionaries, who were primarily concerned with highlighting and condemning Hindu religious customs, were less interested in slavery because they perceived it to be a socio-economic issue, rather than a religious one. Yet, British discussions of the legal basis of slavery in India repeatedly framed it in the context of its sanction under Hindu and Muslim religious laws. Indeed, as there was little conception within colonial jurisprudence of any separate secular authority for Hindus or Muslims, it is difficult to disconnect their conception of the legality of slavery from ideas about its religious sanction. Moreover, while some high-profile Hindu customs used to denounce Indian society, such as *sati* and hook-swinging, were initially presented as religious rites, missionaries later argued that they were not 'authentic' Hindu religious practices precisely in order to circumvent EIC religious neutrality in the campaign for their abolition.[16] The boundaries between what missionaries depicted as religious as opposed to social institutions were thus blurred and indistinct, the more so because the prevailing assumption was that all aspects of Indian life were controlled by a blind adherence to religious traditions. Indeed, the oppressive weight that their religious superstitions were believed to exert meant that Hindus were imagined as bound by chains even more profound and eternal than those of chattel slavery. As a result, the realities of individual domestic or agricultural enslavement were elided, subsumed within a wider discourse of Hindu religious oppression that saw individual enslavement as relatively insignificant compared with the collective bondage of 'heathenism', even as it configured its discussion of Hindu religion and society through metaphors and idioms of slavery.

As the extract from the *Imperial Magazine* cited above suggests, by the 1820s the shrieks, groans and sighs of suffering heathens were as much to be pitied, and to be acted upon, as the screams and moans of afflicted African slaves. In the process, the overarching and enslaving system of 'Hindooism' was presented as the root cause of Hindus' moral and material degradation, in much the same way that the system of chattel slavery of the West Indies was presented as the ultimate cause of African slave suffering and humiliation. Of course, as Benita Parry reminds us, 'discourses of representation should not be confused with material realities', especially in the case of such culturally biased observers as missionaries; the image that missionary publications constructed of Hindu social and religious practice bore little resemblance to the realities of everyday life for the vast majority of Indians.[17] They are, however, useful in revealing how social and cultural movements in the metropole interacted and intertwined to inform colonial constructions of India. By unpicking the discursive contribution that ideas of slavery and freedom made to missionary discourse on India, this chapter will argue that mainstream missionary publications in Britain both drew on shared

intellectual and moral trends, such as the cult of sentiment and ideals of evangelical domesticity, and capitalised on contemporaneous social, cultural and political interest in anti-slavery when formulating their public depictions of 'heathen' society. By making extensive use of graphic accounts and pictorial images of 'bloody and lascivious' Hindu religious rites, and emphasising the pain, suffering and death that they caused, missionary publications strategically deployed a set of discursive techniques also used by the abolitionist movement. They fashioned images of Indian social and religious practices that were designed to mobilise pity, empathy and ultimately generosity in a reading public already conditioned to respond with feeling to the suffering of the African slave. In doing so, however, they, like their abolitionist counterparts, laid themselves open to the suggestion that their more lurid publications bordered on reproducing a 'pornography of pain' that was an integral part of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century humanitarian reform literature.[18]

'The distinguishing characteristics of the Hindu': Charles Grant and William Wilberforce

Accounts of India in Protestant missionary periodicals date back to the turn of the nineteenth century, although they increased in volume in the 1810s and 1820s, as conditions for missionary activity there improved.[19] The catalyst for this rise both in activity and publications on India was, of course, the opening of the subcontinent to evangelisation in 1813. The relaxation of the EIC's former ban on proselytising activity was eventually achieved after concerted evangelical campaigns in 1792–3 and 1812–13, during which the case for the Anglicisation and Christianisation of India was made by men and women who were often both active abolitionists and committed advocates of missions. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that they utilised metaphors of enslavement and emancipation in structuring their arguments, in some cases drawing direct analogies between the state of India's population and slavery. The imagery and ideas that were articulated during these debates were to be influential in setting the tone of later missionary depictions of Indian society and deserve to be explored in some detail. This part will look at two of the most famous articulations of the case for missionary activity in India, by Charles Grant and William Wilberforce, which though penned two decades apart, both contained many of the themes that would become central to evangelical/providentialist interpretations of Britain's imperial duty.[20]

Perhaps the most significant early articulation of what would become standard Protestant missionary tropes about 'heathen' society in India can be

found in Charles Grant's treatise *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*, written in 1792.[21] Grant, who was born in Scotland in 1746, sailed for India in 1765, where he remained in EIC service until his return to Britain in 1790. While there he underwent a spiritual conversion to evangelical Christianity in 1776. Brian Pennington maintains that Grant was subsequently responsible for laying much of the groundwork for the spread of missions in India, appointing evangelically minded chaplains to the EIC service and seeking to convince his fellow EIC servants and Directors of the benefits of evangelisation.[22] Back in Britain in the 1790s, he wrote *Observations* with the intention of influencing his friend Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville, who was a Secretary of State in Pitt's Cabinet and a member of the Board of Control (the committee of six members of parliament charged with overseeing EIC affairs), and persuading him to promote the Anglicisation and Christianisation of India.[23]

Grant was critical of the corruption and exploitation that characterised the early years of EIC rule and argued for an improvement in the quality and morality of EIC administration. He is best known, however, for his critique of the 'moral and intellectual state' of India's native inhabitants, the reform of which, he argued, was fundamental not only to raising their material and spiritual condition, but also to improving the system of administration in Bengal and protecting British interests there. His treatise, based on the writings of earlier commentators and his own twenty-five-year experience in Bengal, explicitly rejected the idea, apparent in some Enlightenment accounts, that Hindus were models of goodness and innocence—harmless, kind, peaceable and suffering. Instead, he painted a picture of them as selfish, cruel, avaricious and tyrannical, completely lacking in truth, honesty, good faith, patriotism and concern for the well-being of others. Thus, although Grant himself admitted that there must be 'Discriminations in so vast a body as the whole Hindoo people' and cautioned against applying his assessment 'to the utmost extent to every individual', he believed that there were 'general features' in their character that could be insisted upon; 'a general moral hue, between which and the European moral complexion, there is a difference, analogous to the difference in colour between the two races'.[24] These failings of the collective Hindu temperament, Grant maintained, were not primarily the result of climate or political institutions, although he did comment on the influence that the 'despotic mode of government' had on the formation of their character, but rather of their religious beliefs and practices and the influence of the 'Hindoo code'.[25] Idolatry and superstition, he argued, 'vitiates and stupefies their minds', while the 'abandoned wickedness of their divinities' and their 'scandalous legends' fostered an immorality, licentiousness, corruption and a malevolence that was only masked by their effeminate exterior and submissive demeanour.[26]

Apart from his assassination of the Hindu character, Grant's most significant contribution to nineteenth-century evangelical understandings of Indian society was perhaps his use of the term 'Hindooism' to describe the religion of its non-Muslim inhabitants. Grant's construction of the entire 'heathen' population of India as labouring under a single, overarching religious structure was extremely influential and set the framework for later missionary descriptions of the 'system' against which they were struggling. Of course, modern ideas of Hinduism as a unified religion, comparable with Islam, Christianity or Judaism, do not accurately reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of pre-colonial Indian belief, for while non-Muslim elite groups across the subcontinent shared what Sheldon Pollack has described as a 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis', dominated by Brahmin priests and loosely shared aesthetic, political and religious conventions, these were cross-cut by widely divergent social, cultural and religious formations.[27] Although the suggestion that 'Hinduism' was a colonial invention is controversial, and tends to underestimate the role of Hindu religious revivalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in reappropriating and restructuring modern Hindu belief, the concept of a single, unified Hindu religion initially emerged out of late-eighteenth-century colonial and evangelical codifications of India's myriad religious traditions.[28] As a result of this process, a former 'primitivist pastiche' of paganism was increasingly replaced by more specific, if no less critical, depictions of the different religions which proselytising Christianity was confronting.[29] The construction of Hinduism and Buddhism as discrete, self-contained religions was also directly connected to the development of new identities, practices and concerns among Christians in Britain, as paganism and sin were removed from 'the dark recesses of every human heart' and repositioned as the properties of people socially and spatially removed from evangelical Christian Britain.[30] As Geoff Oddie points out, in popularising the term 'Hindooism', and presenting it as a unified, overarching religious system that directly impacted upon the moral and material state of the native population, Grant helped to consolidate a specific model of Indian 'heathenism' that allowed Christian missionaries to construct it as the unified obverse to Christianity, clearly delineated from other forms of paganism and containing its own specific features—a single enslaving system that kept the masses of India in degradation, subjugation and ignorance.[31] 'How much the poor people who are enslaved to this superstition', Grant opined, 'must be harassed by it.'[32]

The myriad dictates and rules of conduct that governed Hindu life, the 'ceremonial defilements, pollutions and uncleanness, the ways in which caste may be stained or lost, the methods of purification, the regulations concerning food, the manner of dressing and eating it, the ceremonies at birth and at different ages, at marriages and deaths' all constituted what

Grant called a 'most grievous bondage'.[33] Like the African slave held down by the slave-holder's control over both the means of violence and access to knowledge, the average Hindu was stripped of his free will by the crafty impositions of the Brahmins, whose system of 'absolute dominion' was 'erected upon the darkest ignorance, and the boldest falsehood'. As a result, Grant averred, 'the understanding is chained and kept in perpetual imprisonment ... Every avenue which might lead to emancipation is strongly guarded ... Fear is the grand instrument by which these poor people are held down.'[34] This was especially true of women, 'the most inoffensive and suffering of the Hindoo race', whose position Grant explicitly likened to a form of slavery, arguing that they were 'disposed of in marriage without having their consent asked' and held thereafter 'in slavish subjection by the men'.[35] Submission to the will of the family and good behaviour were ensured by the threat of 'the most terrifying and disgraceful punishments' and by 'imperious dominion, seclusion and terror'.[36] Similarly, although the dictates of the Hindu caste system placed restrictions on the liberty of all, Grant noted that the *sudras* in particular were a 'servile class' whose 'sole assigned duty is to serve the other three'. The caste system, he argued, made their 'chains of servitude indissoluble and eternal', with the lower orders condemned to 'perpetual abasement and unlimited subjection' and with 'no relief against the most oppressive and insulting tyranny, no hope of ever escaping from its sufferings'.[37] Significantly, however, although Grant implied that he considered caste a form of slavery, he did not distinguish between this generalised conception and the existence of specific groups or communities whose bondage went beyond the normal parameters of caste obligation. Rather, he presented a prototypical 'Hindoo' who was 'from the hour of his birth, through the different stages of his existence ... subject to an accumulation of burthensome rites, with which the preservation of his caste, his credit and place in society, are strictly connected'. It is thus, he maintained, that 'abject slavery, and unparalleled depravity, have become distinguishing characteristics of the Hindus.'[38]

Contemporary ideas about the evils of slavery and its degrading effect on human nature clearly influenced Grant's discussion of the moral and material condition of Britain's Hindu subjects. This is not surprising, of course, given that his treatise was first penned in 1792, at a time of increasing agitation for the suppression of the slave trade, for the perusal of his Clapham Sect associates. Significantly, however, although slavery metaphors and analogies loom large in his discussions of the oppressive power of 'Hindooism', especially with relation to caste, the existence of other forms of slavery in India, though present, received a relatively muted treatment in his text. Specific references to actual, rather than metaphorical, slavery as a reality of Indian life are rare, and are deployed not to open up a discussion of the

nature of Indian domestic or agricultural labour conditions, or the ethics of slavery, but to support wider contentions about the degraded state of the Hindu character and the immorality of the 'Hindoo code'. Thus, while Grant acknowledged that domestic slavery existed in India, his discussion of children sold during times of famine was used not to critique the conditions of their subsequent enslavement but to illustrate the moral depravity and unnatural lack of parental affection on the part of the mothers who 'abandoned' them. Although he commented on the various circumstances in which Hindus could be made slaves, noting that 'Slaves are made of the three castes Kheteree, Vyse and Sooder; a Brahmin can never be a slave' and that 'A man of superior caste, if he is upright and steady in the principles of that caste, can never be a slave of a man of inferior caste', he made no comment about the morality of slavery itself on the strength of this information. Rather he used these examples to 'illustrate the nature of the distinctions which obtain among the different castes'.[39] Likewise, while he reported that 'if a man by violence commits adultery on his own slave-girl, a fine of ten puns of cowries (about a shilling) [is payable]', he used this example to attack the lascivious nature of a religious code that ascribes only nominal penalties for acts of adultery, prostitution and fornication, rather than to comment directly on the fact that a man might legitimately own a slave-girl.[40] His denunciations of 'temple prostitutes' (*devidasis*), who were often sold to temples and brought up as servants to the idol, danced in its processions and earned money through their liaisons for the temple establishment, were also concerned with the sexual immorality of their lifestyle rather than the fact that many of these women had been sold or dedicated to temples in their infancy and were little better than slaves. Thus, while Grant was clearly aware of the existence of and apparent religious sanction for slavery in India, he set a precedent for later evangelical depictions of India by subsuming the problems of socio-economic slavery and coercive labour conditions within a wider discourse on the social and religious bondage imposed by 'Hindooism'.

Initially Grant's text was shown only to a few of his most trusted evangelical friends, such as William Wilberforce, Henry Thornton, Hannah More and Claudius Buchanan—the last being one of the 'pious chaplains' who Grant himself appointed to an EIC post and who saw the essay on the eve of his own departure to India.[41] Buchanan, of course, would go on to pen his own controversial essay in support of the Christianisation of India, in 1805, as well as several other publications describing the state of Indian society and discussing the means of its spiritual amelioration and the development of an ecclesiastical establishment there.[42] Although copies of Grant's text were subsequently made and distributed to EIC Directors, it was only in 1813 that it gained a wider circulation, when it was published as a Parliamentary Paper, on Wilberforce's suggestion, during the campaign

to open India to missionary activity. Thus, while Grant's text was significant in foreshadowing the perspectives taken by many early nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries, Geoff Oddie argues that its initial impact was rather more limited than its later fame (or notoriety) would suggest.[43] In Wilberforce and Buchanan, however, Grant was influencing influential men, whose own depictions of India would reach wider audiences and, in the case of Wilberforce, would have significant popular and political impact in the ongoing debate about the moral responsibilities of EIC rule in India, and of British colonialism more generally. Despite his damning critique of the Hindu character, Grant, like many evangelicals after him, ultimately presented the Hindu, like the African slave, as the potential recipient of Christian redemption, which Britain had a duty to dispense and which superseded EIC commitments to religious neutrality. 'Are we bound for ever to preserve all the enormities in the Hindoo system?', he asked. 'Have we become guardians of every monstrous principle and practice which it contains? … Is this the part which a free, a humane, and an enlightened nation, a nation itself professing principles diametrically opposite to those in question, has engaged to act towards its own subjects?'[44] In doing so he shifted the terms of the debate about the EIC's role in India from the secular/political narrative epitomised by Burke and Hastings to an evangelical and providentialist one that would underpin the emerging missionary movement.

As has already been implied, Clapham Sect abolitionists such as Wilberforce, Buxton, Thornton and More were actively involved in the campaigns to open India to missionary activity, which they saw as fundamental to the construction and maintenance of legitimate British rule on the subcontinent.[45] In 1793, this was done primarily behind the scenes, but in 1813 they were willing to espouse a more public position of support. 'You can scarcely conceive how incessantly I was engaged on the subject of the East Indian Charter,' Wilberforce wrote to Lord Muncaster in 1813, 'especially that resolution and clause that respected the communication of Christian light and moral improvement to our East Indian fellow subjects; and I am persuaded that we have, by our success on that instance, laid the foundation stone of the grandest edifice that was ever raised in Asia.'[46] On both occasions, supporters of the missionary project employed tactics similar to those used by the anti-slavery campaign, getting up petitions and pressuring parliament. Indeed, during his famous 1813 speech on the issue in the House of Commons, Wilberforce directly compared the struggle to open India to missionary activity with the campaign against the slave trade:

> On that occasion [he declared of the abolitionist campaign] it was our ultimate object, by putting an end to those destructive ravages, which [had] protracted the reign of darkness and barbarism in that quarter of the globe,

> to open a way for the natural progress of civilisation and knowledge; of Christian light and moral improvement: so now, likewise, we are engaged in the blessed work of substituting light for darkness, and the reign of truth and justice and social order and domestic comfort, of substituting all that can elevate the character, or add to the comfort of man, in the place of the most foul, degrading, and bloody of superstition that ever depraved at once, and enslaved, the nature, and destroyed the happiness of our species.[47]

Indeed, he even compared the arguments of those who spoke favourably of Indian society and culture, and against evangelisation, to those put forward by supporters of the slave trade, who, he claimed, had disingenuously denied the need for reform on the basis that the slaves in the West Indies 'were as happy as the day was long; nay happier, for they danced all night'.[48]

Wilberforce's speech to parliament in 1813 drew heavily on Grant and other evangelical sources for its denunciation of Hindu degradation and 'general depravity', although he also referenced a wide range of 'secular' sources such as Luke Scrafton, Robert Orme and John Holwell.[49] India, Wilberforce argued, contained 'inhabitants differing from us as widely as human differences can go! Differences exterior and interior, differences physical, moral, social and domestic in points of religion, morals, institutions, language, manners, customs, climate, colour, in short in almost every possible particular that human experience can suggest, or human imagination devise!'[50] Many of these differences, he maintained, could be traced to the iniquitous influence of their religion; Hindu divinities were 'absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness, and cruelty' and their religious system 'one grand abomination'.[51] In order to prove this point, and counter the 'favourable opinions of the people of India' put forward by his opponents in the EIC, Wilberforce invoked lurid details of polygamy, infanticide, the destruction of the sick and aged, *sati* and all the 'various obscene and bloody rites of their idolatrous ceremonies, with all their unutterable abominations'.[52] He painted a shocking picture of Hindus as enslaved and degraded by both the authoritarianism of their political institutions and the tyranny of their heathen religion. 'Is it not notorious', he asked his audience in parliament, 'that the nations of India have, from the very earliest times, groaned under the double yoke of political and religious despotism? And can it then be maintained, that these must not have produced a proportionate degradation of their moral character?' 'In truth', he added, 'we find the morals and manners of the natives of India just such as we might have been led to expect from a knowledge of the dark and degrading superstitions, as well as of the political bondage, under which they have been so long bowed down.'[53]

Like Grant, Wilberforce used the rhetoric of slavery and emancipation both to conceptualise the effects of India's 'heathen' religion and to reimagine

Christian Britain's duties towards its colonial subjects. 'Immense regions,' he declared,

> with a population amounting … to sixty millions of souls, have providentially come under our dominion. They are deeply sunk, and by their religious superstitions fast bound, in the lowest depths of moral and social wretchedness and degradation. Must we not then be prompted by every motive, and urged by every feeling that can influence the human heart, to endeavour to raise these wretched beings out of their present miserable condition?[54]

Through instruction in civilised Christian values and religion, Britons could provide their Indian subjects with the method of their own emancipation, for 'it would be impossible that men of enlarged and instructed minds could continue enslaved by such a monstrous system of follies and superstitions as that under the yoke of which the natives of Hindostan now groan.'[55] Moreover, it would ensure the continuance of 'Our Oriental Empire', which, Wilberforce maintained, 'indeed is now a vast edifice; but the lofty and spacious fabric rests on the surface of the earth, without foundations.'[56] In a section which resonates with later historians' discussions of his 'smiling hypocrisy' and the cultural racism of the abolitionist and missionary movements, Wilberforce denied that he was making himself an enemy to the Hindus by laying bare their degraded state, and condemned those who claimed to be friends of India, but who were

> in reality recommending the course which is to keep those miserable beings bowed down under the heavy yoke which now oppresses them … it is because I wish to do away this unjust inequality, to raise these poor brutes out of their present degraded state to the just level of their nature that I am now bringing before you their real character and explaining to you their true condition. And am not I, therefore, acting the part of the real friend?[57]

Missionaries and their publications

If Grant and Wilberforce's pivotal interventions in the campaign to promote missionary activity in India demonstrated how specific constructions of Indian society and religion could be utilised politically to advance the cause of evangelisation in India, once the missionary movement became established an increasing volume of information about the subcontinent became available to the evangelical public in Britain. In order to fund their endeavours overseas, all the major societies held regular meetings, hosted speaking tours and lectures and published various magazines and periodicals for sale and circulation among their supporters. These events and publications were extremely significant, for they were, as Susan Thorne argues, an important

site through which working- and middle-class Britons could experience the empire.[58] They were also carefully constructed to perform a specific function, being 'the end result of a well oiled and efficient production machine'.[59] They were propagandist in nature, aimed at engendering ideological and financial support for missionary endeavours and cultivating 'a community of like minded British citizens … and … potential missionary recruits'.[60] As such, as Catherine Hall reminds us, the missionary public sphere and its productions can be 'conceptualised as a site for the construction of the constitution of Christian subjects', which was as much about forming good Christian identities among the mainly middle-class, lower-middle-class and artisan men and women who made up its constituency, as about disseminating images of the 'heathen'.[61]

Although missionary society periodicals varied in tone, scope and content according to their intended audience, most usually contained a mixture of three main forms of content: reports of society business and strategic and ideological debates (e.g., minutes of AGMs and lists of subscribers, etc.); salutary details of missionary successes (preaching tours, conversions and good works, including the progress of missionary schools and hospitals); and critical depictions of the horrors against which they were struggling—idolatry, ignorance, superstition and abominable religious practices and customs. Cheaper and more lurid tracts, aimed primarily at the lower-middle and working classes, tended to concentrate primarily on this last strand, while the more expensive and sophisticated publications, such as *Periodical Accounts Relative to the Baptist Missionary Society*, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* and *Quarterly Chronicle* (issued by the LMS and later entitled *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*) contained more coverage of institutional and ideological debates. Among the cheaper tracts, the CMS *Quarterly Missionary Papers*, for example, was priced at 1*d.* each (or 5*s.* per 100), but was distributed free to 'humble but regular contributors' and was self-consciously aimed at soliciting lower-middle-class and working-class support. Each paper consisted of four pages, illustrated with graphic woodcuts, and concentrated primarily on disseminating 'in plain language, intelligence of the proceedings of the Society, with engraved representations and printed accounts of the ignorance and miseries of the unhappy objects of their kind solicitude'.[62] Similarly, in addition to its monthly *Missionary Notices*, which contained lengthy extracts from letters and journals, reporting either progress of its missions or the condition of the local 'heathen' population, as well as the minutes of AGMs and extracts from its reports, the WMMS also published the *Quarterly Papers Relative to the Wesleyan Missions and the State of Heathen Countries*, which was distributed free of charge to subscribers of 1*d.* a week. This last publication consisted of four pages, one of which usually contained a dramatic illustration depicting the subject of

the report that followed. Although the content was often calculated to evoke interest and wonder, the language and style did not differ markedly from the *Missionary Notices*, and it should be noted that although the 'high-brow' periodicals contained more sophisticated material, they also carried some of the sensational accounts, as well as the dramatic engravings, that formed the main content of the cheaper tracts.[63]

The depictions of Indian religion, society and customs reproduced in the cheaper tracts were a site on which specifically propagandist images of India and its inhabitants were constructed and disseminated to a wide audience. Content for these sections was chosen selectively from the correspondence of missionaries in the field, or from the published work of men like William Ward and Claudius Buchanan, and then further refashioned to serve the purposes of the particular missionary magazine or paper. The more 'exotic', shocking or grisly rites and practices—*sati*, hook swinging, infanticide, religious self-mortification, the festival of Juggernath—received pride of place, and functioned both as examples of depth of heathen degradation that justified missionary intervention, and as hooks to catch the voyeuristic interest of the reading public at home. The importance of these accounts is highlighted by CMS *Missionary Register* editor Josiah Pratt, who, although usually evincing a relatively liberal-minded and scholarly attitude to Hinduism, admonished CMS missionary William Greenwood for not sending him more vivid accounts of 'pagan abominations'.[64] Many missionaries in the field consciously fashioned their correspondence with their home organisations with the imperatives of metropolitan consumption in mind, while missionary societies in Britain further edited, or abridged, their letters and texts, stripping away any careful ethnographic research and leaving only the sensational details. These details were portrayed to the reader through what Howard Malchow might describe as a 'racial gothic' discourse that employed certain 'striking metaphoric images to filter and give meaning to the flood of experience and information from abroad'.[65] The rites and customs that they chose to emphasise obviously affected the way in which India was projected through these publications, creating an image of its society and religion that reflected both the missionary's providentialist world view and the discursive and strategic imperatives of their campaign.

Missionary attitudes to Indian society, as refracted through these publications, were complex. The ethnocentrism of the mission venture was reflected in an often disparaging view of indigenous peoples and cultures, yet, unlike many colonial officials, missionary identity was validated in part by the nature of their engagement with the local Indian community.[66] As a result, although their depictions of Indian society were deeply coloured by their cultural racism and religious agenda, the nature of their work meant that they often took a more active interest in Indians and their religious beliefs and practices

than other ex-patriot Britons living in India at the time. Brian Pennington, for example, notes how William Ward's major works reflected careful observation and detailed ethnographic study of Indian people, their customs and practices, even while he evinced a scathing hostility towards Hinduism.[67] What would now be considered racist stereotypes and patronising, paternalist views abounded: a new missionary to India, the LMS declared, must have 'a charity for the heathen which no experience of Hindu duplicity, indifference, ingratitude or moral degradation could diminish, a love to the saviour which all the deadening influences of heathenism would not be able to extinguish or subdue'.[68] Primarily, however, Indians were considered misguided but redeemable children 'hurrying to eternity under the fearful oppression of a deadly system'.[69] Just as abolitionists did not attribute African slaves' lack of virtue to 'nature', but to the demeaning influence of slavery, missionaries attributed Hindu degradation to the oppressive power of the superstitious rites, practices and beliefs foisted upon them by their religion. The missionary project was, after all, based on the *potential* equality of man and the possibility for other races to be liberated, redeemed and raised from savagery to Christian civilisation. As influential Baptist minister Abraham Booth put it in a sermon in 1792, 'the despised Africans are naturally as capable of being made the spiritual subjects of Jesus Christ as ourselves'.[70] The Indian 'heathen', like the African slave, was thus subject to what John Marriott refers to as a 'double movement of exclusion and incorporation', being subordinated to the European as an ignorant and uncivilised non-Christian, but also offered the potential for inclusion and redemption through Christian conversion. 'It was primarily through the lens of Christianity,' Marriott argues, 'that knowledge of the manners and customs of alien people was sought, not to understand and explain, but as a means of incorporating them into a European order.'[71]

The real focus of missionary vitriol and condemnation was not Africans and Indians themselves, but the degrading horrors of slavery and the iniquitous influence of the Hindu religion respectively. The Indian under 'Hindooism', like the African under slavery, was a currently reprehensible but ultimately redeemable victim of an evil, enslaving system. He did not exercise his own agency in any aspect of his life, as individualism and autonomy were completely suppressed by the strictures of caste, religious idolatry and priestly imposition—the 'deadening influence of heathenism'—just as the African slave's free will was negated by the hopelessness of enslavement and controlling violence wielded by the slave-owner. If British abolitionists sought literally to 'strike off the fetters of the slave', missionaries sought to free the heathen 'from error's chain'.[72] Thus, while most of the publications produced by the various missionary societies in the first four decades of the nineteenth century did not overtly discuss the existence of domestic or agricultural slavery in India as part of their propagandist literature, they

did draw heavily on implicit analogies between slavery and heathenism. Moreover, by exposing and critiquing the 'bloody and lascivious' customs of the Hindu religion, which, they argued, would be reformed or eradicated by the spread of enlightened Christianity, they mirrored abolitionist deployments of the physical and emotional suffering of African slaves in their campaigns for abolition and emancipation.

Although they shared many tropes and ideas in common, missionary accounts of Indian society were not homogeneous. There were subtle differences of interpretation and emphasis, as well as varying strategic priorities and theological perspectives, depending on denomination, location and the intended market and purpose of any given account. Missionary propaganda intended for the home market, for example, which included many of their more widely circulated publications, tended to be more shocking, as well as more overtly defamatory, than the more nuanced and complex accounts of Indian social customs that some missionaries produced for British audiences in India.[73] The *Friend of India*, a Baptist missionary newspaper published in Serampore, for example, was unusual among missionary publications in that it often dealt with issues relating to the material, as well as the moral, development of India. It carried articles on the state of Indian agriculture, among other relevant issues, including two pieces specifically on slavery in India (in 1823 and 1825 respectively). These articles were written in response to metropolitan debates about the sugar duties, with the aim of refuting the claim being made by some West India supporters that East India sugar was raised by slaves. As such they concentrated on presenting Indian slavery as mild, primarily female, domestic and unproductive. It was also, they initially maintained, discountenanced by the British authorities—a misinterpretation of EIC policy that had to be corrected in a later edition.[74] Their discussion of slavery in India was designed, therefore, not to explore the nature of coerced labour in India for its own sake, but rather to deploy a specific image of it in the context of wider debates about the relationship between slavery, markets, tariffs, free labour and colonial commodity production in India. In doing so, they were reproducing emerging metropolitan interest in these issues and repackaging it for an ex-patriot British audience in India. Such debates and accounts of slavery in India did not, however, filter through to mainstream missionary publications in Britain, which while taking an implicitly anti-slavery position often avoided direct identification with political abolitionism.

The different missionary societies had different perspectives on slavery and abolition, of course: the Wesleyans and Baptists, for example, had a long tradition of anti-slavery sympathies, although their public commitment to the cause was tempered in the pages of their missionary publications until the mid 1820s in order to facilitate mission work on the West Indian plantations. The Anglican Church, on the other hand, did not prohibit the

ownership of slaves, and as late as 1826 seven of eighteen rectors in Jamaica owned properties worked by slaves, and all except two owned domestic slaves.[75] Thus although the CMS counted William Wilberforce among its founding members, and occasionally denounced slavery in general terms in the pages of its publications, it did not promote the anti-slavery movement, or refer to events in the West Indies in its *Quarterly Missionary Papers*. Yet the propagandist literature of all the major missionary societies was clearly influenced by the ongoing debates about slavery and abolition, and all used metaphors of bondage and emancipation in their depictions of heathen iniquity. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore in detail the various subtle differences and tensions between the rhetoric, ideologies and theologies of the different mission societies. Instead, it focuses on some of the key shared themes and rhetorical strategies employed by the major missionary societies, regardless of denomination. It suggests that these contributed to fashioning a wider evangelical view of India in which the existence of individual slavery was elided within a wider construction of an entire population enslaved by its superstitious customs and beliefs. For, although the emphasis and detail might vary between societies and publications, their underlying rationale was surprisingly consistent, drawing heavily on intellectual and moral trends, discursive strategies and metaphors shared with the contemporaneous abolitionist campaign.

'Chains forged by the devil, to hold the Hindoos in slavery': caste, idolatry and Indian society

Like Grant and Wilberforce before them, many missionary periodical publications of the 1810s and 1820s relied heavily on images of slavery and bondage when describing the nature of Hindu religious oppression. The metaphorical linking of 'heathens' and slaves was not new in the early nineteenth century, of course, nor was it unique to evangelical thought. Seymour Drescher points out that

> [g]lobally speaking, until the late eighteenth century it was western European freedom that was regarded as a 'peculiar' institution. As late as 1772 Arthur Young estimated that, of 775 million inhabitants of the earth, all but 33 million, residing in western Europe and the northern Anglo-American colonies, were slaves in one form or another.[76]

As John Marriott notes, however, by the late eighteenth century, many Enlightenment thinkers, political theorists and theologians came to the conclusion that 'there was a fundamental contradiction between the perpetuation of slavery and human progress'.[77] Slavery was increasingly presented as

an evil, regressive and inefficient institution that undermined man's 'natural right' to freedom and 'symbolise[d] all the forces that threatened the true destiny of man'.[78] In European terms, this meant that 'progress' must be predicated on the abolition of slavery and the slave trade: when applied to other cultures, it increasingly became a signifier of their historical regression, and an explanation for their social and political backwardness. Slavery, as the antonym of progress and civilisation, became a useful metaphor in emphasising the backwardness and inferiority of peoples who were not slaves of European making, but were 'slave like' in their customs, practices and natures.[79] Lambert and Lester have argued that from the mid nineteenth century on 'the career of slavery involved expansion of both spatial scope and application' being applied to a range of other forms of subjugation in the empire and the wider world.[80] This trend towards using slavery as a 'paradigm of social injustice' long pre-dates the mid nineteenth century, however, and the condition of Britain's colonial subjects was articulated in ways that bore striking resemblances to the discursive construction of slavery from the late eighteenth century on, in both secular and evangelical discourses on empire. India was no exception, as its climate, its political institutions and its religious practices were all thought to predispose the Indian masses to thraldom. Alexander Dow, an army officer with the EIC, writing in 1770, for example, famously declared that the 'languor occasioned by the hot climate of India' naturally inclined 'the native to indolence and ease; and he thinks the evils of despotism less severe than the labour of being free'.[81] This situation, Dow claimed, was exploited by Muslim despotism in the pre-colonial period, as a combination of nature and custom reduced Hindus to a state of abject slavery. This 'slavery' and 'languor' existed, as David Arnold points out, 'in perceived contrast to the stimulus of the more barren soils and more temperate climate which had fuelled civilization and fed thoughts of freedom in the more northerly lands of Europe'.[82] As Thomas Macaulay famously wrote of the inhabitants of India, 'There never, perhaps, existed a people so thoroughly fitted by nature and by habit for a foreign yoke.'[83]

In addition to climatic conditions, Indian subservience was reinforced by her political economy, characterised in the eighteenth century as 'oriental despotism'—a system of absolute and unchecked monarchical power that stood in sharp contrast to the checks and balances that were the hallmarks of British democracy. As one EIC student of revenue remarked, 'In the absolute governments of Asia, it is not one great despot that reigns—thousands of inferior degree tyrannize in the subordinate spheres assigned to them, over a depressed and broken minded people, habituated to the most abject servility for a series of ages.'[84] As Sudipta Sen puts it, in the British view, 'Indian kingdoms were hardly built on the foundations of liberty and property. Instead they represented sordid examples of medieval tyranny reminiscent

of the Dark Ages in Europe. Rather than a civil society composed of free and conscientious subjects, the original inhabitants of India were scarcely better off than slaves.'[85] Indeed, Sen argues that colonial depictions of Indians' passivity, effeminacy and enslavement were part of a wider process of naturalising both Britain's masculinity and her new position as ruler of a subject race.[86] Thus, the idea that Indians were naturally predisposed to be dominated by a powerful outside race became part of the rhetoric justifying empire—Alexander Dalrymple, for example, advocated enlightened despotism as the most suitable form of government for India, noting that, as a conquered people, Indians 'must still be slaves, however light the yoke; slaves can only be governed by despotic power'.[87] The discourses of natural history, the Great Chain of Being, stadial theory and the idea of 'natural slavery', together with arguments about political economy and 'tradition' were all pressed into service to justify colonisation. Just as chattel slavery in the West Indies had once been defended on the grounds that the 'Negro' was a member of an inferior race and a natural slave, so colonialism in India was justified on the basis that Hindus were passive, weak and unsuited to freedom. As Revd William Tennant put it,

> It may therefore be questioned whether that zeal which burned so furiously among you for the liberation of slaves was in every case guided by knowledge. There are at least some instances in which the tender mercy of your humane reformers would be cruelty, for independent of the circumstances peculiar, perhaps, to the natives of India, there are many persons whose intellects may not be sufficiently cultivated to guide their conduct in a state of perfect freedom.[88]

Thus, although Edmund Burke called for the liberation of Indians from 'the bonds of mental slavery', it was not expected that they would be partakers of full British liberty.[89] British colonialism in India was portrayed as liberating the masses from oppressive Muslim tyranny, but it did so by replacing it with a benevolent, paternalistic form of mastery that would free Indians from their backwardness and apathy and bring them the blessings of Western progress. Such a benevolent form of foreign dominance was presented as a boon to the colonised—Sir William Jones, for example, noted, 'Making their slavery lighter by giving them their own laws is more flattering to me than the thanks of the Company and the approbation of the king'[90]—yet it also in many ways resonated with the racial and cultural assumptions of the West Indian planters' paternalist discourse.

Although they replaced the focus on political despotism with one on the enslaving power of false religion, missionaries and other evangelical observers often employed the rhetoric of enslavement in their denunciations of Indian

society. Claudius Buchanan, who was a keen, if controversial, advocate of spreading Christianity in India, noted the Hindu's 'moral depravity, their personal wretchedness and their mental slavery',[91] while William Ward declared that 'their long slavery to ancient patterns and usages has, like the Chinese shoe, made the whole race cripples'.[92] Indian society and religion was represented through the vocabulary of Satanic oppression, enslavement and ultimate liberation and salvation through Christ, and its suitability as a field of missionary labour was also emphasised in these terms. As 'the stronghold of the prince of darkness',[93] India was presented as 'terra sculptilium, a land of sculptured imagery', whose sacrilegious idols were the produce of the Hindu's 'disordered imagination', the 'fabrication of his fancies and his fears'.[94] Like Grant and Wilberforce, Buchanan had pointed to the oppressive influence of Hindu religious ritual, noting that 'The malignity of any superstition may be calculated almost exactly by the number of its holy days, for the more the mind is enslaved by it, the more voluminous will be its ritual, and more frequent its ceremonial of observance.'[95] Mainstream Protestant missionary discourse ridiculed the dizzying array of Hindu rites, festivals and deities, and emphasised the 'bloody and lascivious' nature of Indian worship in order to undermine the relatively positive view of Indian religion and philosophy that had predominated among some Enlightenment thinkers and orientalist scholars in the eighteenth century. Readers of the *Missionary Notices* were warned that 'Hindoo theological doctrines are by no means of that pure and sublime nature which we were taught.'[96] Instead, 'the heathen', whether in India or elsewhere in the world, was presented as deluded, blinded and enslaved by diabolical religion, terrible idols and cunning and rapacious priests, while British Christians were encouraged to intervene to free 'all the millions of these, [Satan's] wretched slaves'.[97] In the West Indies, as Catherine Hall notes, 'slavery had acted upon the ignorance and superstition of Africans, making their character infinitely worse'.[98] In India, idolatry had had a similarly pernicious effect, keeping Indians in bondage, destroying their happiness and corrupting their nature.

Both evangelical and 'secular' observers located the caste system as the most obvious form of social enslavement in India. With its supposedly rigid hierarchy, hereditary occupations and obligations, and accompanying rules of conduct and penalties of ostracism and social death, the caste system was represented both as akin to slavery for the lowest orders and as one of the major obstacles in the way of conversion to Christianity.[99] Wilberforce, in his speech in parliament, described it as 'a system at war with truth and nature; a detestable expedient for keeping the lower orders of the community bowed down in an abject state of hopeless and irremediable vassalage.' Indeed, after praising the scope for individual improvement in Britain, he went on to note that

> [e]ven where slavery has existed, it has commonly been possible, (though in the West Indies, alas! artificial difficulties have been interposed), for individuals to burst their bonds, and assert the privileges of their nature. But the more cruel shackles of Caste are never to be shaken; as well might a dog or any other of the brute creation … aspire to the dignity and rights of man.[100]

In rhetoric that echoed abolitionist assumptions about the symbolic importance of the withholding of education for entrenching the master–slave relationship,[101] the higher castes were accused of condemning the *sudras* 'to ignorance as well as humiliation' and thus perpetuating a system that ensured their continued oppression.[102] Of course, contemporary historians now question the extent to which the immutable and immemorial caste system described by both evangelical observers and colonial officials ever really existed. Although British commentators like Wilberforce saw it as an ancient, universal and rigid hierarchy that left no room for social mobility or individuality, in pre-colonial India, caste identity was neither as all-encompassing nor as fixed as colonial accounts implied. Indeed, Susan Bayly argues that far from being a long-standing 'traditional' formulation, the basic structure of caste society only emerged in the century before the advent of colonial rule and reflected the political expediencies of influential new groups rather than timeless religious ideals.[103] British colonial ethnographers, as well as subsequent anthropologists and sociologists, however, looked at India's multilayered, complex and often fluid social systems and attempted to reduce them into a static social hierarchy of 'castes' based on birth and ritual divisions between purity and pollution. Moreover, through their attempts to understand, codify, categorise and count the people of India, a previously dynamic and negotiable social system became increasingly fixed.[104]

The colonial construction of caste as a rigid, inflexible and eternal hierarchy clearly influenced missionary interpretations of the Hindu socio-religious system, and their publications vociferously attacked caste as a ploy by the Hindu elite to maintain their own status and keep the lower orders in subjugation. The CMS *Quarterly Missionary Paper*, for example, reported of the caste system:

> You may easily see, Christian friends, how craftily this scheme of caste has been invented to give Brahmins dominion over all others. Caste is, indeed, the great bond of Hindu superstition and is the chief support of the empire of the enemy of mankind among the Hindoos … A sudra or labourer, if he were the most worthy and wisest man of ten thousand, must be a sudra as long as he lives; and all his children to succeeding generations must be sudras … mark how artfully the system is contrived to keep the wretched people in bondage! Remember these millions of enslaved men, your fellow subjects, in your

> prayers; that God will graciously break those strong bonds of superstition and pride by which the Ruler of Darkness in the word keeps them enslaved.[105]

Significantly, however, although they were quick to attack the inordinate power of the higher castes over the lower ones, missionary publication were careful to maintain the social hierarchy at home, and were quick to undermine any suggestion that the example of the downtrodden *sudra* should be used by British servants to challenge their own position of subordination. Indeed, the social tyranny of caste was explicitly contrasted, unfavourably, with the position of the working class in Britain. In its inaugural address, the CMS *Quarterly Missionary Paper* sought to enlist the support of the servants of Britain by informing them that 'All the blessings which you enjoy in this land of civil and religious liberty came by the Gospel of Christ; but in heathen countries servants are slaves and masters are tyrants.'[106] Despite this stirring rhetorical device, however, the fact that some servants really were slaves in India was not a theme that was developed.

'A natural alliance between obscenity and cruelty': sensibility, empathy and the pornography of pain

Analogies between slavery and missionary depictions of Indian society relate not only to the overt use of slave metaphors in missionary accounts but also to the relationship between the shared rhetorical strategies employed by both the missionary movement and the abolitionist campaign. The conscious deployment of images of 'bodily pain, offended human dignity, or transgressed social norms' to engender sympathy and support from their audiences was a prominent feature of both missionary and abolitionist publications.[107] These visual and discursive strategies drew on wider moral and intellectual trends, especially the cult of sensibility, or sentiment; an aesthetic and moral ideology that emerged during the eighteenth century and emphasised sympathetic and empathetic concern with the pain and suffering of other sentient beings. The superior virtue of the 'man (or woman) of feeling' was marked by his tender-hearted concern for the torment of others, including previously marginalised and despised groups such as slaves, criminals, the insane and 'pagans'. As Brycchan Carey has shown in detail, protagonists on both sides of the slave trade debate made strategic use of the rhetoric of sensibility in order to connect with a reading public immersed in the 'cult of feeling'.[108] Similarly, Laura Stevens notes how early protestant missionary writing linked Britain's imperial self-image to the compassion that its people felt for 'heathens' overseas and used that emotion to encourage both donations and ideological support.[109] Compassion and the reluctance to inflict pain became synonymous with 'civilised values', cruelty with savagery

and barbarism.[110] As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out, 'Sensitivity to others' pain … served as an index of cultural, and even racial, superiority and an absolute signifier of difference.' Rajan notes the 'propagandist use of pain' in a missionary discourse that 'widely evok[ed] the screams of the burning *sati*, berated Indian villagers for their barbarity and displayed their own contrasting religious piety'.[111] Drawing on these very missionary accounts, Wilberforce, in describing *sati* in the House of Commons, remarked,

> As to their nature I should shock the feelings of the hardest heart, if I were to read to you the authenticated statements of the horrid scenes of this kind which are continually taking place; to which the people are so accustomed, that, as I lately learned from a private friend of my own, who witnessed one of these dreadful transactions, a great concourse of spectators even in populous districts is not collected; and what is worse than all, the horrible scene is beheld with as much unconcern, and even levity, as we see among the lower orders in this country, when the destruction of one of the inferior animals is the subject of their savage mirth. But I will spare you the disgusting recital; and yet I well remember what was said nearly in the place where I now stand on an occasion not dissimilar, by a Right Honourable Gentleman now no more, (Mr. Fox), 'that true humanity consists, not in a squeamish ear, but in feeling for the sufferings of others, and being forward and active in relieving them.'[112]

Feeling, as Michael Bell points out, 'was to be aroused directly by the occasions of distress, and should lead equally directly to acts of benevolence.'[113]

Prior to the eighteenth century, enjoyment of spectacles of public torture was not only acceptable, but normal.[114] The move away from barbaric justice in Europe during the Enlightenment, however, saw 'the disappearance of the tortured, dismembered, amputated body, symbolically branded on the face or the shoulder, exposed alive or dead to public view'.[115] These developments, as Karen Halttunen shows, coincided with advances in the technologies of anaesthesia and pain relief, which made pain unacceptable and eradicable, where before it had been seen as natural and inescapable. In doing so they inspired a new revulsion from pain that was later portrayed as natural, but was actually quite a modern phenomenon. As a result, pain became both fascinating and obscenely titillating, precisely because it was increasingly taboo. Sentimental sympathy, invoked by images of physical and emotional suffering of others, was said to be a 'dear delicious pain', a 'sort of pleasing anguish'—an emotional experience that mingled pleasure with vicarious pain.[116] By the end of the eighteenth century, however, critics were questioning the morality of sentimentality, suggesting that its adherents were more concerned with their own feelings on witnessing suffering than with the suffering itself.

Marcus Wood, in his provocative work *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography,* has highlighted how the growth of abolitionism coincided not only with the development of the cult of sentiment, but also with the emergence of pornography as an organised leisure industry, drawing parallels between abolitionist depictions of the implements and processes of slave torture and modern sadomasochistic pornography.[117] In a similar vein, Halttunen argues that the pornography of pain was not simply a seedy under-seam of humanitarian reform literature, but an integral part of humanitarian sensibility.[118] Jamie Bronstein refers to the gory descriptions of industrial accidents in nineteenth-century Britain and America as a 'pornography of death', describing how sentimental accounts of suffering families, designed to solicit contributions to their welfare, were juxtaposed against titillating descriptions of mangled and mutilated bodies, designed to sell newspapers.[119] Similarly, both abolitionists and missionaries relied on horrifying the reader with the barbarities of the systems they sought to reform. As Henrice Altink notes, 'Of all the indecencies linked with slavery, abolitionists were most enraged about the violence done to the slave's body.'[120] Anti-slavery literature was replete with descriptions of the physical and emotional horrors of slavery, from the middle passage to the tortures inflicted on slaves on arrival in the Americas; whippings and thumbscrews, hanging by the flesh and burning alive were all depicted, among many other horrors. Similarly, missionary publications tended to dwell on the visually and emotionally shocking, violent or obscene, invoking the horrified support of their readers by picking out the most sensational and painful Hindu customs for detailed description and visual representation. This tendency can be traced back to Grant, whose depiction of the 'Hindoo code' emphasised the 'shocking barbarity of their punishments … the cutting off of legs, hands, noses, and ears, putting out of eyes, and other penal inflictions of a similar kind, all performed in the coarsest manner'.[121] His list of crimes and punishments supposedly sanctioned under Hindu law, including various amputations, burning alive and frying on hot metal, as well as violent religious customs such as *sati*, human sacrifice, hook-swinging and the 'tormenting inflictions to which the Jogis subject themselves', echoed the abolitionist recitation of slave punishments in the West Indies in all their 'unfeeling barbarity', and performed a similar discursive function.[122]

In order to maximise the reader's sentimental response, both abolitionist and missionary publications emphasised the authenticity of their material through the use of eyewitness accounts and detailed mechanistic descriptions, which were employed to reinforce the factual nature of the horrors described. As Michael Bell points out, sentimental literature gained some of its force through the preservation of the dramatic premise that the events had literally occurred and had been set down by the characters themselves. In fiction, narrative techniques such as the epistolary form helped the

willing suspension of disbelief and encouraged the reader to identify with the character.[123] Missionary publications likewise stressed the reliability of their accounts, often emphasising that the writer had observed the events in question personally and had a duty to report them fully and accurately, 'however revolting may be the enormities displayed to a mind of refined sentiment'.[124] Although it reinforced authenticity, the eyewitness account also raised the spectre of inappropriate voyeurism, however: a tension apparent in some missionary accounts themselves. The CMS's *Quarterly Missionary Paper*, for example, carried an account by Claudius Buchanan of the festivities at the temple of Juggernath that highlights the concern of the evangelical 'man of feeling' with his own response to the suffering he witnesses. Speaking of the 'licentious acts' that formed part of the worship, Buchanan commented:

> I felt a consciousness of doing wrong in witnessing it. I was also somewhat appalled at the magnitude and horror of the spectacle. I felt like a guilty person upon whom all eyes were fixed; and I was about to withdraw, but a scene of a different kind was now to be presented. The characteristics of Moloch's worship are obscenity and blood. We have seen the obscenity. Now comes the blood.[125]

He then went on to describe in detail the crushing of pilgrims under the wheels of Juggernath's car, a scene illustrated for the reader with a detailed engraving (Fig. 4).

Concerns about the voyeuristic role of the observer are apparent in European eyewitness accounts of various Hindu customs, but are especially

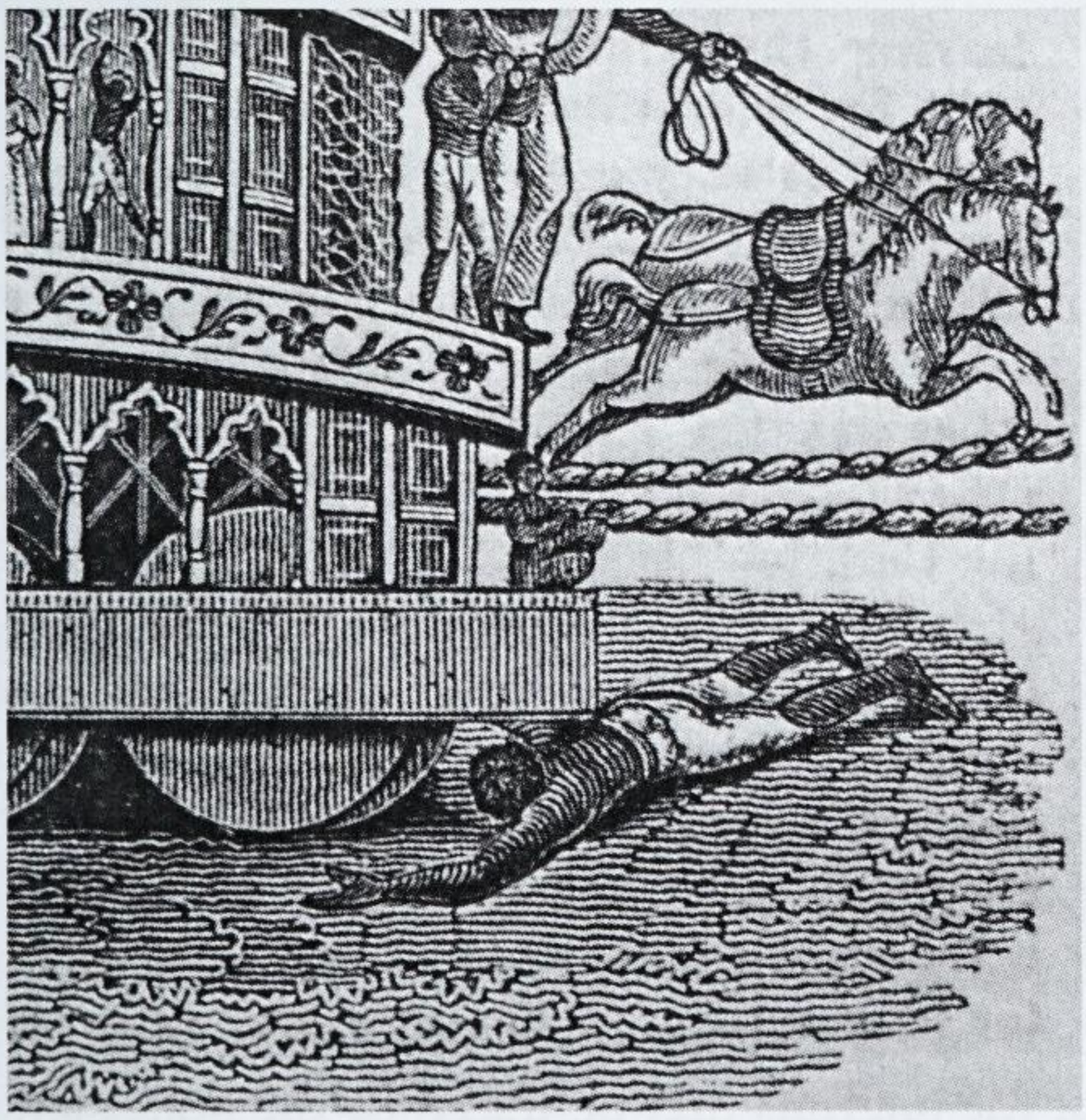

Figure 4. The Festival of Juggernath.

prominent in accounts of *sati*, which combined the physical torture of self-immolation with the emotional distress of a ruptured family and the sentimental iconography of beauty and virtue in distress. Many scholars have commented on the voyeuristic and self-indulgent nature of the presence of European observers at *sati* scenes, suggesting that they may have been actively searching for the 'thrill of horror' that so characterised their professed response to the rite. Monika Fludernik, for example, places British accounts of *sati* in the context of the 'Burkean Sublime', drawing out the ambivalence created by the juxtaposition between the horrendous physical suffering of the widow and the pleasurable emotional suffering of the observer.[126] 'When describing how they are irresistibly drawn towards the spectacle, almost against their will, or when emphasizing their painful experience,' Fludernik maintains, 'these travellers follow, whether intentionally or subconsciously, the Burkean and sentimental traditions.'[127] Similarly, Jeanette Herman explores the central tensions between the language of 'feeling' and that of 'reason' in official EIC accounts of *sati*, contrasting this with the use of early nineteenth-century discourses of sentimentality in female literary and missionary accounts.[128] Indeed, she argues that the 'residual structures' of eighteenth-century ideas of sensibility are prominent and unapologetic in missionary accounts of *sati*, which, she argues, reflected not only 'an ambivalent guilty pleasure on the part of witnesses' but also the intellectual and moral roots of social benevolence and philanthropy.[129]

As Buchanan's account of Juggernath, cited above, suggests, evangelical sensibilities shied away from recounting in detail scenes of sexual excess, although they were often alluded to. Pain, suffering and torture, however, were more freely described, and took on fetishistic qualities within missionaries' depictions of Indian society and religion. Thus, the *Quarterly Missionary Paper*, reporting on 'self-tortures practised in honour of Shiva and Parvati', commented that 'Both indecent and cruel rites are practised in the idolatrous worship of these supposed deities … Of the impure rites, we shall give no account: it would shock and defile your minds to read the description of them. But of the cruel rites, we will give a few instances'.[130] The 'pornography of violence' inherent in abolitionist depictions of the tortures inflicted on suffering slaves was thus reproduced in the context of India with detailed descriptive accounts of the often self-inflicted torments imposed upon Hindus by virtue of their religion. Human sacrifice, though never conclusively proved to exist in India, appeared as a popular and sensational theme, but perhaps more significant was the indirect scale of misery and death occasioned by religious devotions in India, which were invoked to shock and horrify the reader. The *Quarterly Missionary Paper* described the hardship, endurance and exhaustion encountered on a pilgrimage to Juggernath, adding 'the route of the pilgrims may be traced by the bones left

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1
3
J. Chapman, Sc.
1. Purana Poori, an Oordhbahu Saniassy. 2. Purrum Soatuntre Perkasanund, a Ser-soja Saniassy. 3. A Jogey.
London Published Sept. 1, 1809, by J. Wilkes.

Figure 5. Indian holy men, 1809.

by the jackals and vultures … Dead bodies are seen in every direction. Dogs, jackals, and vultures, are observed watching the last moments of the dying pilgrim, and, not unfrequently hastening his fate.'[131] Insensitivity to death and suffering marked both the West Indian slaver and the Hindu priest, and images of the dead and dying abounded in this form of missionary writing. The *Quarterly Missionary Paper*, for example, described the death of eighteen women in a crush at the temple of Juggernath, saying 'the dead bodies were removed by hooks and poles and thrown over the boundary wall like so many dogs'[132]—an image that resonates with abolitionist descriptions of slave-ship captains carelessly throwing the bodies of dead slaves overboard. Similarly, mechanistic accounts of the processes of suffering inflicted on widows burnt alive on their husbands funeral pyres and pilgrims crushed by the car at Juggernath, as well as the pain and mutilation inflicted by hook-swinging and other forms of religious self-mortification, were held up to the readers' view in much the same way as the implements of torture and the scarred body of the Negro slave were utilised within abolitionist discourse. Hindu devotees bore the marks of their enslavement to their superstition inscribed upon their bodies like slave-brands: one Indian *fakir*, for example, was said to have 'shut himself up in a cell, where he vowed to do penance for twelve years. There he stayed until the vermin gnawed his flesh, and left marks that remained when Mr Duncan saw him'.[133] Similarly, a Christian convert, Rughoo, still bore the physical marks of his earlier enthusiasm for 'idolatrous and evil practices. His back was covered with scars, made by the hooks with which he had often been suspended in the swinging ceremony."[134] The *Quarterly Missionary Paper* even carried illustrations of Indian *fakirs* in various poses of religious mortification, the descriptions of their atrophied limbs and scarred bodies emphasising the enslaving power of religious superstition that would make them inflict such bodily suffering upon themselves (Fig. 5).

Perhaps the most widely reported and sensational form of religious self-mortification encountered by missionaries in India was *charak-puja*, or hook-swinging, in which the devotee was suspended from ropes secured by hooks passed through the flesh on his or her back, buttocks or thighs (Figs. 6 and 7). This rite, which was carried out in various ways in different parts of India, was mainly practised by the lower castes, often during festivals, and was designed to please, or appease, the deities.[135] Accounts of hook-swinging, which appeared repeatedly in the mission press, were characterised by a combination of shock at the enormity of the tortures inflicted, and a fascination with the detailed mechanics of the rite's performance. The Wesleyan *Missionary Notices*, for example, described the 'engine of tortures' used in hook-swinging as

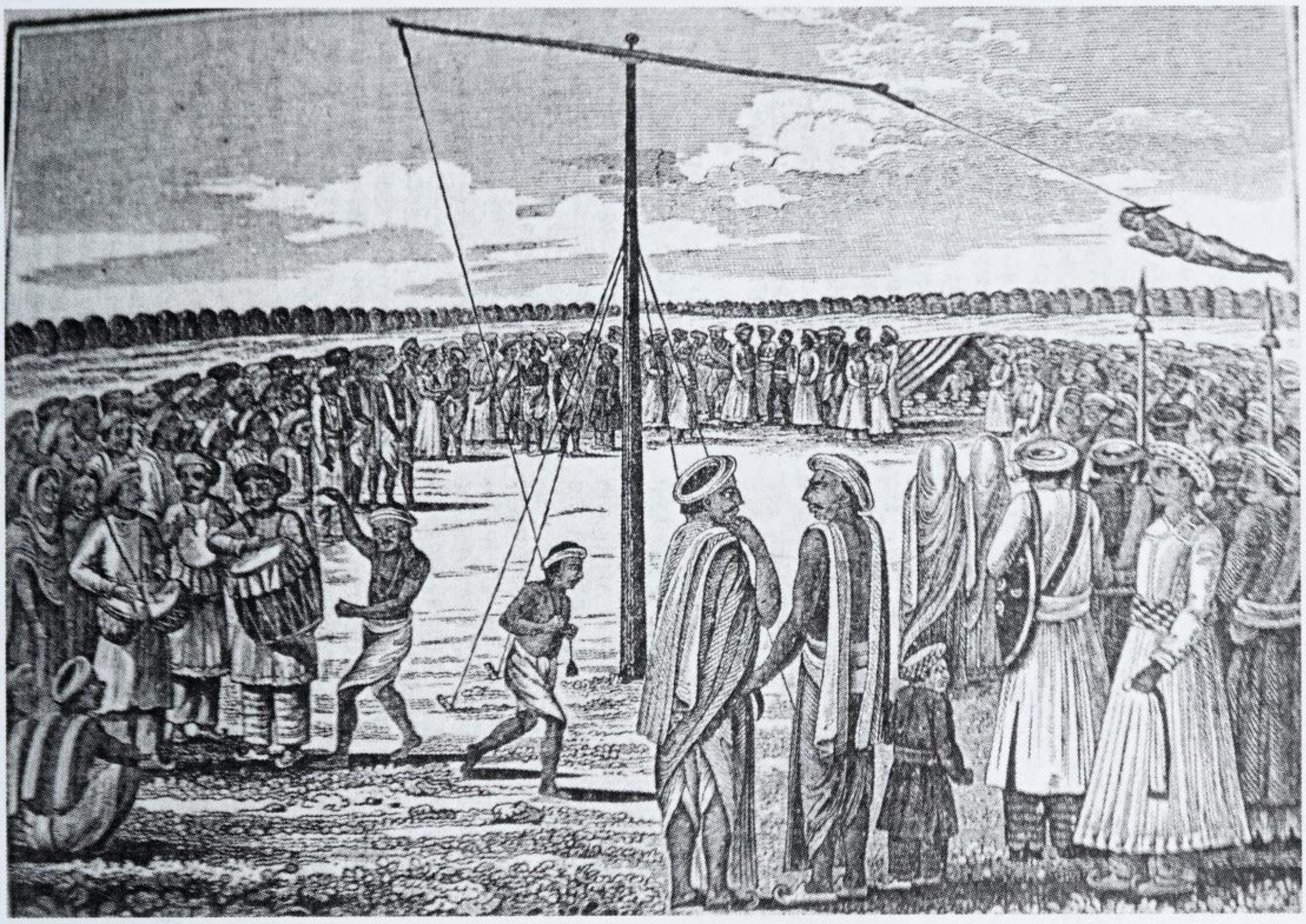

Figure 6. Hook-swinging.

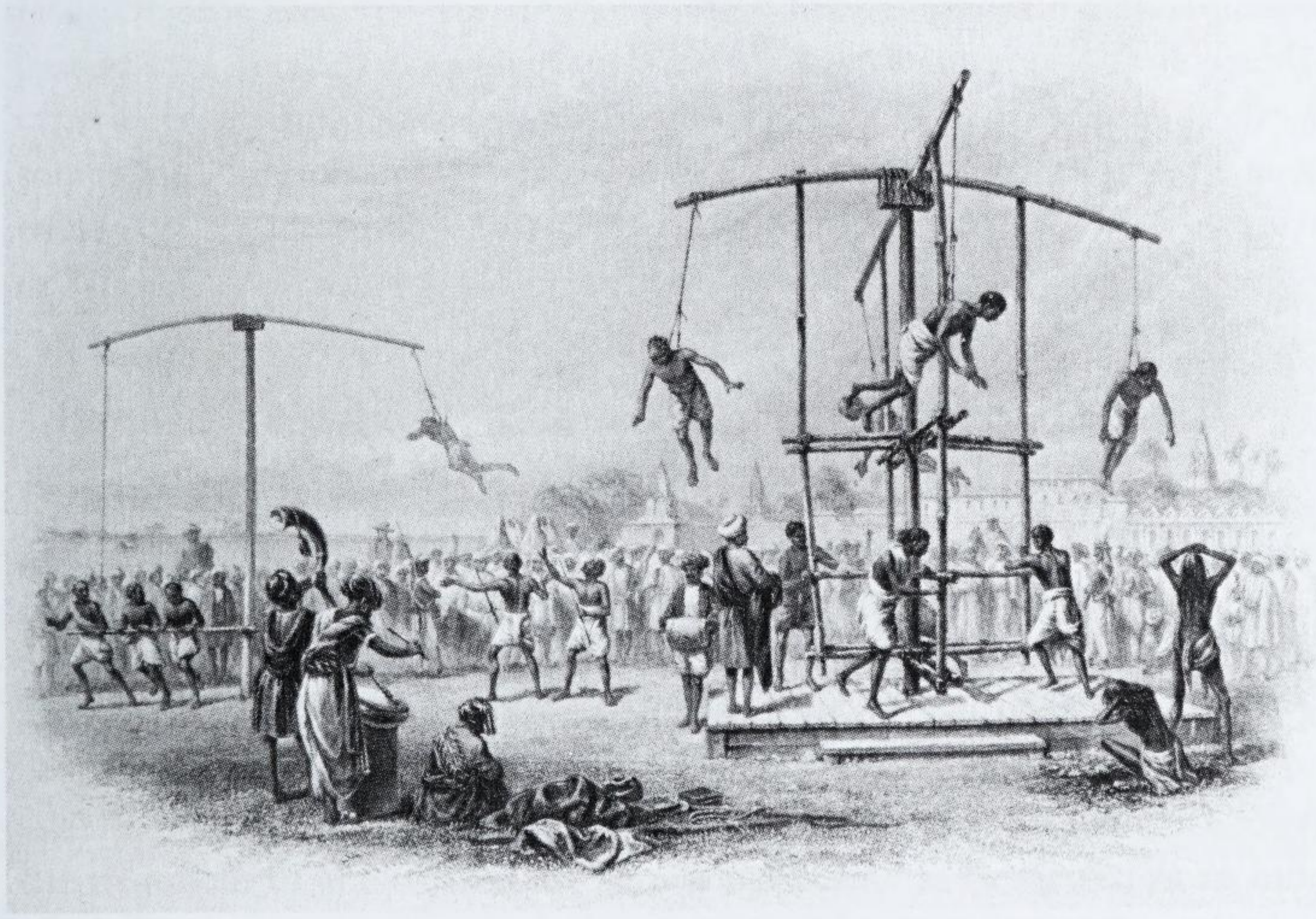

Figure 7. *Charak-puja*—a Hindu ceremony involving swinging (c.1754).

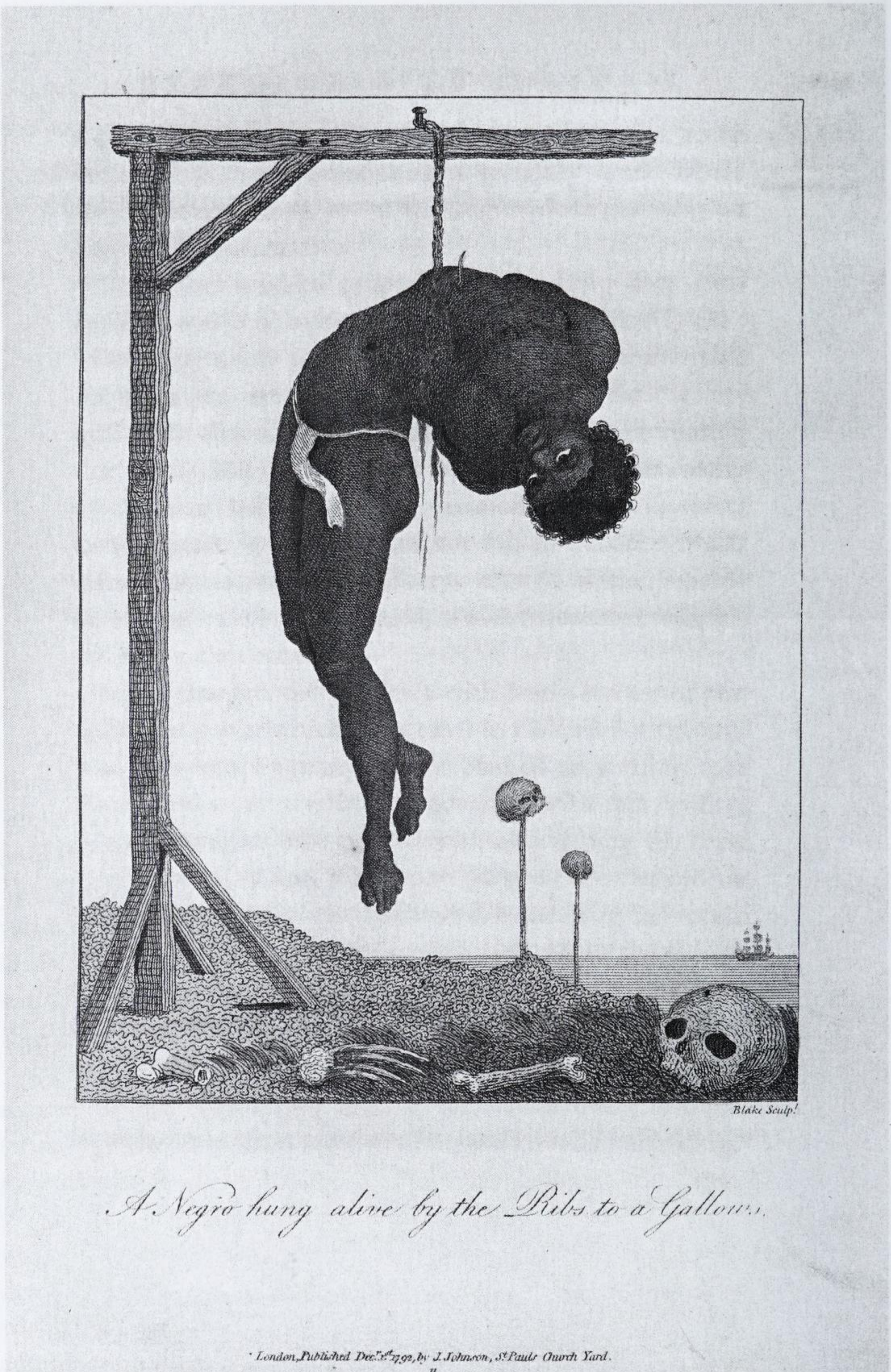

Figure 8. A Negro hanged alive by the ribs to a gallows.
A skull and bones on the ground.

> [t]wo cartwheels upon the axis of which was perpendicularly erected a pole, ten or twelve feet in length. On the top of this perpendicular pole, another pole, of about twenty-five feet in length was so fixed, horizontally, that, by means of ropes fastened to one end of it, the opposite end might be let down to the ground, or elevated at pleasure to the height of about twenty feet. Near the end of the pole to be thus elevated, was fastened on it a cloth, or a kind of canopy; and directly under this canopy was fastened a rope for suspending the person voluntarily devoted to torture.[136]

It then went on to describe how a man and then a woman were suspended from this machine by 'two iron hooks, having each two prongs', which were 'thrust through the skin and principal muscles on the small of the back', and then attached to the pole. The man is described as a 'poor, frantic creature', but the woman 'seemed to manifest greater fortitude and contempt of pain than the man; for, while the weight of her body was entirely suspended on the hooks in her back, she voluntarily flung herself about by a variety of action, which must have greatly augmented her sufferings'. The whole was accompanied by music, noise and the applause of the onlooking multitude. The account concludes 'Here the Christian may behold something of the degraded, deplorable, perishing state of the Heathen. How hard their bondage to Satan! How wretched their present condition! and, alas, what must be their condition in eternity, unless the Gospel is preached to them, which is able to make them wise, unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus.'[137] This account, like similar ones in other publications, was accompanied by a detailed engraving, showing both the 'engine of torture' and the experience of the devotee. Such images bore striking visual similarities to some in abolitionist publications, including William Blake's famous illustration of a slave suspended by his rib in Stedman's *Narrative* (see Fig. 8), or Moses Roper's mechanical drawing of the machine his master used to suspend and swing him as a punishment.[138]

Gender, domesticity and emotional suffering

The involvement of a female devotee in the *Missionary Notices*' description of hook-swinging is significant, for violence against the female body was a particularly evocative image for both missionaries and abolitionists alike. 'The lacerated slave body in abolitionist discourse', Henrice Altinck remarks, 'was first and foremost a female body, since they regarded physical violence against women as a particularly insidious crime against humanity.'[139] As the treatment of 'the weaker sex' increasingly came to be viewed as an index of civilisation, women's physical or emotional mistreatment in colonised, non-Christian societies became a particularly potent indicator of their

degradation. As a result, specific images of female Hindu and African slave-women's physical suffering, and of the mental and emotional traumas to which they were subjected, were used extensively by missionaries and abolitionists to emphasise the pernicious effects of the systems they sought to reform and to mobilise support at home, particularly among British women, who were seen as the natural champions of their less fortunate sisters overseas.[140] As Catherine Hall notes, the 'suffering bodies of enslaved women and their children evoked a compassion that came to be understood as a moral imperative—the personal body that bore children, suckled and nourished them, was a common bond between those who suffered and those who would help'.[141] As William Ward put it in an open letter to Miss Hope of Liverpool in 1821,

> Shall I not hear, after my return to India, that the females of Britain and America have united to make the case of their sex in India a common cause … Will you not become the guardians of these Ten Thousand orphans surrounding these funeral piles, and endeavouring to put out these fires with their tears? Your sex will not say that in the roasting alive of four widows every day there is not blood enough shed to call forth their exertions. Seventy-five millions of females in Hindoosthan, frowned upon in their birth, denied all education, and exposed to a thousand miseries unknown among females in Christian countries, have surely a claim tender enough, powerful enough to awaken all the female sensibility of Britain and America.—Let the females of the United Kingdom speak, and they must be heard. Let the females of both countries give the means of affording education to their sex in India—and these infants must be saved; these fires must be put out; these graves must be closed for ever.[142]

Women in Christian countries, Ward reminded his audience, benefited from a 'profusion of privileges'. Indian gender codes and conjugal relationships, however, like those of the dysfunctional slave family, fell far short of the evangelical ideal. The Hindu female, Ward maintained, was despised at birth and kept in ignorance and drudgery throughout her life, before potentially being subjected to either a horrifying death as a *sati*, or miserable old age as a widow. Rather than being the 'angel in the house', the Indian wife was never considered as the companion of her husband, but rather as his slave.[143] Similarly, the Abbé Dubois commented that

> [in] general, concord, the union of minds, and sincere mutual friendship are rarely found in Hindu families. The extreme distance kept up between the two sexes, which makes the women absolutely passive in society, and subject to the will and even the caprices of the men, has accustomed these lords of their destiny to regard them as slaves, and to treat them on all occasions with

> severity and contempt. It is therefore in vain to expect between husband and wife that reciprocal confidence and kindness which constitute the happiness of a family. The object for which a Hindu marries is not to gain a companion to aid him in enduring the evils of life, but a slave to bear children and be subservient to his rule.[144]

Such critiques of Hindu domestic life provided a stark contrast to Christian ideals of companionate marriage and were used to demonstrate the fundamental degradation that resulted from the absence of divine light. Of course, not all British observers subscribed to the negative images of Hindu conjugality propagated by Ward and others. An article by 'Verus' on the character of female society in India, published in the *Asiatic Journal* in 1821, presented a more positive picture of Indian women's lived experience, lamenting that 'there is no person who has distinguished himself more in the career of abusing the natives of India than the Rev. W. Ward.'[145] Missionary propaganda was influential, however, and representations of the degraded state of Indian womanhood had a particular sentimental pathos for an evangelical audience in Britain that increasing saw women as the moral and spiritual heart of the home.

As the nineteenth century progressed and the missionary movement became increasingly 'feminised', more female authored publications appeared. With greater access to the inner sanctums of the Indian home, by virtue of their sex, women missionaries were more likely to write about domestic life and conditions. Most of these works appeared in the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, after slavery had been 'delegalised' in India, so rarely refer to it directly. One exception is Priscilla Chapman's *Hindoo Female Education*, published in 1839, which referred to the sale of female children into domestic slavery:

> In so degraded an estimation is the female infant held, that even in Calcutta, a pressure of poverty not infrequently induces the parents to offer them for sale, prizing them at the smallest consideration. However vigilant our laws, it must be admitted that numbers are thus subjected to slavery for lust and menial purposes. Seizures of children of a riper age, in the act of being conveyed to their new proprietors, have not been of unusual occurrence with the Calcutta police; very recently twenty girls in one boat on the Hoogly, destined for incarceration in a Musselman's house, have been happily placed at liberty.[146]

Chapman also followed the practice, adopted by Ward and others, of drawing analogies between slavery and marriage in order to critique a society that did not conform to the ideals of evangelical domesticity. 'The young married woman', she remarked, 'is given in charge to her mother in law, professedly

for the purpose of being taught her duties as a wife, but in fact she becomes little better than her menial slave',[147] adding later that the Indian home was characterised by 'discord' and 'misery' because of the 'long established idea that the wife must and ought to be the slave instead of the help-meet'.[148] This theme was picked up by later female missionary publications, which increasingly became the main site for the discussion of Indian domestic relations.[149]

Both Hinduism and the West Indian slave system were portrayed as eroding moral values, severing affective ties and perverting human nature. Wilberforce, for example, commented that India's Hindu population often displayed an 'utter want of natural affection', and that this meant that 'at one time, parents, at another, children, become the victims of these barbarous systems of superstition'.[150] In particular, infanticide and *sati*, which both involved emotional trauma, as well as physical suffering, were presented as signifiers of the corrosive power of Hinduism on most sacred impulses of human nature. The voluntary sacrifice of children at Saugor, in which mothers supposedly threw their infant children to the alligators in fulfilment of a vow, or to appease a vengeful deity, provided an evocative inverse to the loving African families torn apart by vicious slavers and indifferent masters.[151] Take, for example, the following account given by Mr Smyth in parliament, and printed in the *Calcutta Gazette* in 1792, of a ten-month-old African child, who was whipped to death by a slave-ship's captain for refusing to eat. 'The most detestable part of that detestable story,' Mr. Smyth informed the House, was that after the death of the child, the Captain

> would not suffer any of the people who were on deck to throw the child overboard, but called the wretched mother of the child to perform that last sad office. The mother was unwilling to throw her child overboard. The Captain beat her, and made her take up the child, and having carried it to the side of the ship, she threw it into the sea, at the same time with her face turned in a contrary direction, that she might not see it.[152]

The natural distress of the loving African mother on having her child tortured, killed and cast into the sea, contrasts sharply with missionary descriptions of religious infanticide in India.[153] 'At Saugor Island formerly,' William Ward reported,

> mothers were seen casting their living offspring among a number of alligators; and standing to gaze at these monsters quarrelling for their prey, beholding the writhing infant in the jaws of the successful animal, and standing motionless while it was breaking the bones and sucking the blood of the poor innocent! What must be that superstition which can thus

> transform a being, whose distinguishing quality is tenderness, into a monster more unnatural than a tiger prowling through the forest for its prey?[154]

Similarly, referring to specifically female infanticide among some Rajput communities, Ward enquired of his female readership:

> And does no mother interpose her tender entreaties to spare her daughter? 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the infant of her womb?' Oh what need of the softening and enlightening influences of the gospel, where mothers have become monsters—have sunk below the wolf and the tiger. Through what unknown, unheard of process must the female heart have passed, thus to have lost all its wonted tenderness; thus to have laid hold of a nature not found anywhere else upon the earth?[155]

Infanticide, together with the occasional account of a 'voluntary' *sati*'s willingness to desert her soon to be orphaned children (such as that in the *Calcutta Journal* of 1820, which reported that 'The devotee ... on this occasion, as on many others, regardless of maternal feeling, had left an infant child at home to come to the awful pile'), were portrayed as indicative of the dehumanising power of Hinduism.[156] As one correspondent to *The Times*, who had been present at a *sati*, put it in 1811, 'I endeavoured to awaken the maternal affections, conceiving them to be the strongest that rise in the human mind; but superstition had extinguished even them.'[157] Evocative images of familial relations destroyed, or distorted by slavery, were also common in abolitionist discourse, from the forcible separation of families to the refusal of slaves to reproduce in captivity and the shocking stories of slave infanticide, such as that of Margaret Garner, immortalised as the inspiration for Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The idea that slave-women might prefer to kill their newborn children rather than see them condemned to slavery, or that they practised methods of controlling reproduction as a form of 'gynaecological resistance', has been the subject of considerable historical debate, with some arguing that slave-women used contraception, abortion and infanticide to control fertility, while others argue that the low reproduction rates in some slave societies were a product of overwork, undernourishment and traumatic physical and psychological conditions.[158] Dr Robert Jackson, who practised medicine in Jamaica in the nineteenth century, argued that slave mothers were not naturally deficient in parental affection, but that 'hard usage' rendered them 'indifferent' or made them 'wish that their offspring may fail' rather than be subjected to the plantation regime.[159] That Christian enlightenment and the establishment of the evangelical family ideal were seen as beneficial to both the woman and her infant, because it restored 'natural' and affectionate familial relations, was a common theme of both missionary and abolitionist propaganda. Wilberforce himself used the example of successful

EIC intervention to prevent infanticide at Saugor as an example of the progress that could be made with the right attitude, holding up the image of the rescued child as a powerful motivation for further reform.[160]

The *sati* was not always presented as the deviant mother who abandoned her child. Sentimental literature, in particular, frequently invoked her own emotional trauma at being forced to abandon her infants. Thus, in the following poem by Mrs Phelps, written in 1831, the child is ripped from the unwilling mother's arms in a separation that mirrored the maternal loss when slave-children were sold and permanently removed from their parents:

> But what arrests her steps with that dread start,
> What sudden anguish rends her broken heart?
> …
> She feels a little hand within her own,
> And hears her tender Infant's plaintive moan;
> 'Tis more than human nature can withstand,
> The tender pressure of that little hand;
> And the poor baby's weak and mournful cry,
> Awakes the mother's bitterest agony.
> She wildly turns, and on each cherub face
> Imprints, in frenzy, one farewell embrace;
> While the stern Priests her kind attendance chide,
> And bid them take the babes and quickly hide
> Them from her gaze; as none may dare to stay
> The wretched Suttee on her destined way.[161]

The tensions between the image of the widow who deserts her child and the one who has that child torn from her created an ambivalence that underpinned the common depictions of the widow as struggling between the 'natural' bond of maternal affection and the 'false' weight of a superstition that perverted her nature. A correspondent for the *Calcutta Journal* reported of a *sati* in 1820:

> Yet when a Gentleman present observed to her that by giving her life to be destroyed she was not only acting contrary to the will of God, but also doing an injury to society by leaving her child unprotected, she evinced the most poignant anguish that can be conceived. With a look of wild and pitiable distraction she said 'Speak not of my child—Why do you wound my bosom with the idea?' Then relapsing into superstitious ravings she added 'But that child no longer belongs to me—I am not its mother … '—So powerful is bigotry over the nobler emotions of nature.[162]

Here the widow is depicted as torn between natural affection and religious indoctrination, between her instinctive reactions and her moral degradation.

No practice epitomised the supposed cruelty of Hinduism and the unnatural relationships that it fostered more than *sati*, accounts and images of which incorporated both the physical anguish and the emotional suffering of the widow (Fig. 9). They invoked the spectatorial sympathy of the observer through descriptions of the orphaned children wrenched from their ill-fated mothers' arms, or adult sons turned murderers, forcing their grief-stricken and terrified mothers to the pyre. Revd John Hawtrey, addressing the Auxillary Society of the London WMMS, recounted the case of a widow who went to perform *sati* in 1791:

> in the midst of the smoke she contrived to slip from the pile; but it was presently seen that there was but one victim. She was sought for and found in the jungle by her own son. She begged, she wept, she entreated her son, whom she had brought forth, to whom she had given suck, and whom she had nourished and supported, to spare her; but all was to no purpose: he pleaded that if he did not sacrifice her he would lose his caste, his religion and his reputation; and the inhuman monster took his own mother, tied her hands and feet, laid her upon the pile and burned her to ashes.[163]

Such depictions of the son forced by stern priests, or sterner socio-religious dictates, to light the pyre that will consume his still-living mother resonate with abolitionist descriptions of slave husbands and children forced to watch,

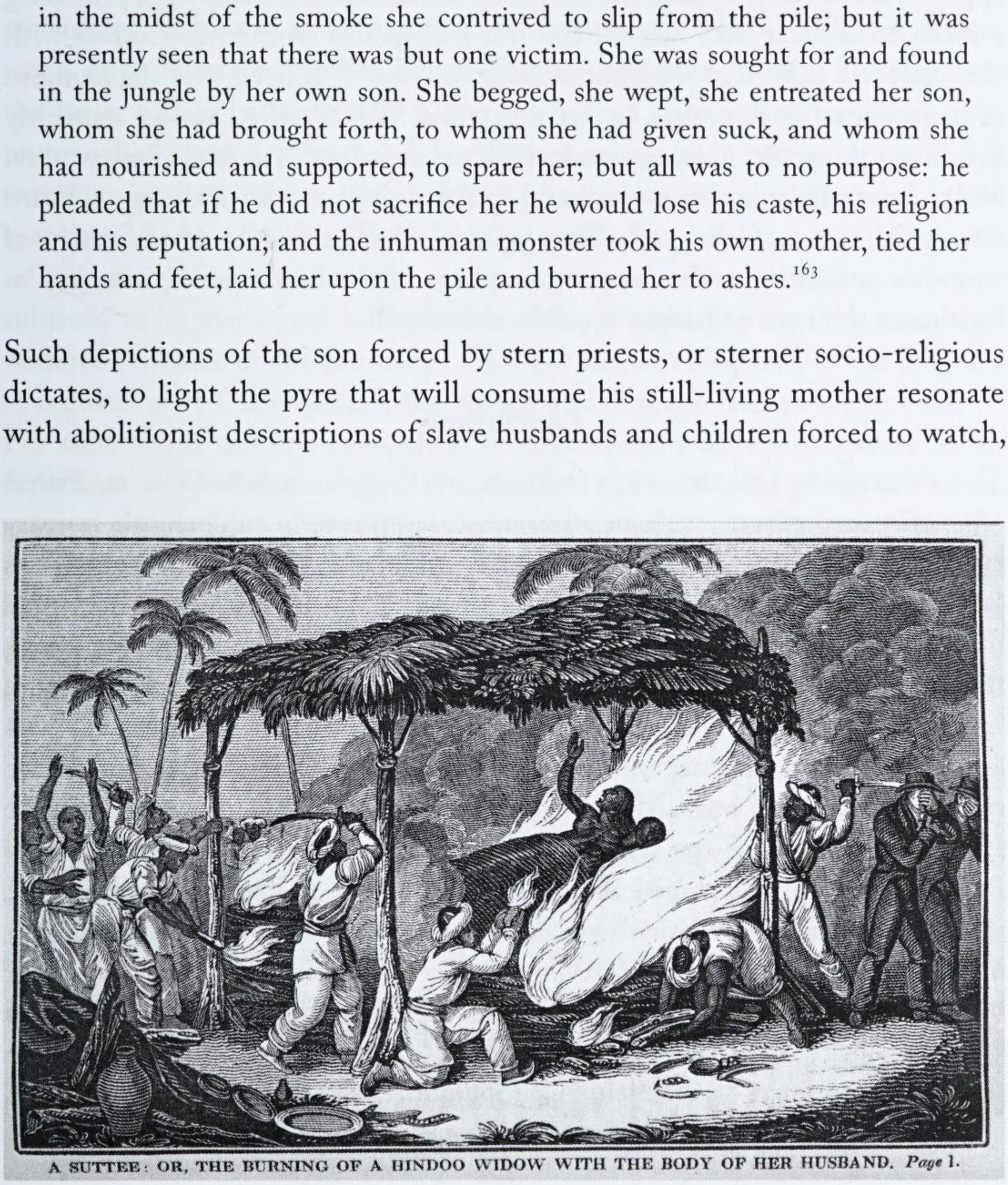

Figure 9. 'A Suttee: Or the Burning of a Hindoo Widow with the Body of her Husband'.

or even to participate in, the mistreatment of their wives or mothers. As Altink discusses, abolitionists 'often described scenes where a slave-woman was either held down by one of her own children, or where her children were among the spectators of the event'.[164] Like slavery, the horrors of *sati*, and the destruction of families that it entailed, was taking place under British rule, and men and women in Britain were increasingly encouraged to take moral responsibility for it. Sati, as Hall points out, 'evoked both horror and pity, sentiments which effectively raised money. Perhaps it also evoked excitement, associated with the exoticism of difference."[165] It also provided an apposite arena for female involvement in the missionary campaign, providing a focus of interest that was suitable for evangelical women concerned with the imposed sufferings of their heathen sisters.[166] Indeed, the deployment of sentimentalist discourse in accounts like Ward's relied on an explicitly 'feminine' domestic ideology and affective morality that identified women with a 'naturally' more emotional and spiritual perspective. In doing so, Ward attempted to use feeling to effect political change and took advantage of women's association with the private sphere of the home and spirituality to legitimate their participation in public debates.[167]

Conclusion

The frontispiece of the 1832 edition of Peggs's *India's Cries to British Humanity* represents perhaps the most iconic early nineteenth-century evangelical depiction of *sati* (Fig. 9). In it a dark-skinned woman reaches out from the pyre, while men in Indian dress hold torches, or wield swords that may be used both to prevent her escape and to cut the ropes supporting the roof of the pyre and thus hasten her demise. Turning their eyes away in horror are two men, marked out as British by their light skins, bowler hats and tail coats. As an image, Jeanette Herman suggests the engraving can be read in a number of ways. Most obvious is the juxtaposition between barbaric Hindu enjoyment of the sacrifice and civilised British horror. Given that Peggs's text was overtly critical of the EIC's refusal to abolish *sati*, however, the averted eyes of the British witnesses can also be read 'as an embodiment of Britain's refusal to act to prevent it'.[168] Here white men are clearly not intervening to save a brown woman from brown men.[169] Herman also notes that the image, which was produced for an audience in Britain, relied on the unaverted gaze of the British public and their subsequent outrage and sympathy.

> In its sentimental appeal to the British public, therefore … the triangulated relationship among the burning body of the appealing widow, the averted gazes of the British onlookers, and the outraged sympathy of the British

> public constructs the colonial relationship as one based on British benevolence as contrasted with Indian women's suffering, on the one hand, and Indian men's barbarity, on the other.[170]

It is perhaps the existence of *sati* in India, together with the wealth of other sensational and evocative 'pagan abominations', that go furthest towards explaining the missionary movement's relative disinterest in Indian forms of slavery and coerced labour. Far from being the 'great evil' of the region, as it was in Africa and the West Indies, slavery in India was just one among many shocking and reprehensible practices; indeed, it was not even considered to be the most pressing. As late as 1840, Revd William Adam, in an open letter to Thomas Fowell Buxton designed to raise awareness of the issue, had to concede that 'Slavery is indeed only one of the many evils under which India suffers, and I will even admit that its operation is less extensive and its effects less injurious than some other evils that I could mention.'[171] As Claudius Buchanan put it, 'what is there in buying and selling men compared to our permitting thousands of women, our own subjects, to be every year burned alive without inquiring into the cause and without evidence of the necessity? Or what can be compared to the disgrace of regulating by Christian law the bloody and obscene rites of Juggernaut?'[172] For nineteenth-century evangelical observers, the realities of slavery as an economic and social institution in India, and the associated plight of various groups and individuals within that system, were overshadowed by the conception of an entire heathen civilisation enslaved by the various forces of oriental despotism, nature and climate, idolatry and false religion, and dominated, as Buchanan put it, by 'the tyranny of superstition and the slavery of ignorance'.[173]

Notes

1 James Peggs, *India's Cries to British Humanity: Relative to the Suttee, Infanticide, British Connexion with Idolatry, Ghaut Murders, and Slavery in India*, 2nd edn (London: Seely and Son, 1830).

2 See, for example, James Peggs and J. G. Ravenshaw, *Abolition of the Pilgrim Tax in India: Extracts from a Letter to Bengal Dated Feb. 26th, 1833, on the Pilgrim Tax* (Coventry: s.n. 1833); James Peggs, *The Suttees' Cry to Britain; Containing Extracts from Essays Published in India and Parliamentary Papers on the Burning of Hindoo Widows; Shewing That the Rite Is Not an Integral Part of the Religion of the Hindoos, etc.* (London: Seely & Son, 1827); James Peggs, *Ghaut Murders in India: An Appeal to British Humanity and Justice Respecting the Practice of Exposing the Sick on the Banks of the Ganges; To Which is Added, Humane Hints for the Melioration of the State of Society in India* (London: Seely, 1828); James Peggs, *Hindoo Infanticide: The Present State of Infanticide in India* (London: s.n. 1829); James Peggs, *A Cry from the Ganges. The*

Present State of the Exposure of the Sick, on the Banks of the Ganges: A Letter (London: s.n. 1843).

3 Peggs's chapter on slavery was reprinted in 1840, when abolitionists began to turn their attention to slavery in the East. James Peggs, *Slavery in India: The Present State of East India Slavery, Chiefly Extracted from the Parliamentary Papers on the Subject. Printed March 1828, Aug. 1832, Aug. 1838*, 3rd edn (London, 1840).

4 Peggs, *India's Cries*, p. 364.

5 *Friend of India*, 13 (Serampore: Mission Press, 1823), pp. 66–7. The article went on to argue, quite wrongly, that there was no agricultural slavery in India, and what domestic slavery there was continued against EIC regulations. Two years later the authors were forced to admit that they had themselves been misinformed as to the status of slavery in India, particularly when it asserted that slavery was not permitted under EIC rule. *Friend of India*, 15 (Serampore: Mission Press, 1825), p. 481.

6 William Tennant, *Indian Recreations: Consisting Chiefly of Strictures on the Domestic and Rural Economy of the Mahommedans & Hindoos*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: C. Stewart, 1803), p. 128.

7 Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or, Ordinations of the Pundits* (London: s.n. 1776).

8 William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*, vol. 1, 2nd edn (Serampore: Mission Press, 1818), p 455.

9 J. A. Dubois, *Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the People of India, and of Their Institutions Civil and Religious; Translated from the French Manuscript* (London, 1817), p. 455.

10 See, for example, Howard Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 169–87; David Brion Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823–1833', *Journal of Negro History* 46.3 (1961): 154–73.

11 Tennant, *Indian Recreations*, p. 128.

12 William Ward, *Account of the Writings, Religion, and Manners, of the Hindoos: Including Translations from Their Principal Works*, vol. 4 (Serampore: Mission Press, 1811), p. 212.

13 Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*, p. 158.

14 Dubois, *Description*, p. 455.

15 Temperley, 'Delegalization'.

16 See Andrea Major, '"Pious Flames": European Encounters with Sati before 1805', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 27.2 (2004): 153–81; Andrea Major, *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati, 1500–1830* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

17 Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', cited in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture, and Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 15.

18 See Karen Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *American Historical Review* 100.2 (1995): 303–34.

19 The first edition of the *Periodical Accounts Relative to the Baptist Missionary Society*, published in 1800, contained descriptive letters from William Carey dating back to 1793.

20 There were other important texts in this context, of course, including Claudius Buchanan, *Memoir of the Expediency of an Ecclesiastical Establishment for British India* (London: s.n. 1805) and William Wilberforce, 'Letter to a Friend on the Duty of

Great Britain to Disseminate Christianity in India', *Christian Observer* (May 1812): 263–4.

21 Charles Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals, and on the Means of Improving It* (London: House of Commons, 1813).

22 Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 42.

23 Dundas was also a prominent parliamentary supporter of abolitionism.

24 Grant, *Observations*, pp. 25, 31.

25 The result of oriental despotism, Grant commented, was that 'every man is a slave to those above him, a despot to those below; the more he is oppressed, the more he oppresses'. Ibid., p. 40.

26 Ibid., p. 64.

27 See Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 13.

28 For more on the construction of Hinduism, see Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*; Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793–1900* (New Delhi and London: Sage, 2006); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 1999).

29 Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, p. 29.

30 Susan Thorne, cited ibid., pp. 24, 29.

31 Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, p. 72.

32 Grant, *Observations*, p. 71.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., pp. 31, 56, 28.

36 Ibid., p. 30.

37 Ibid., pp. 44–5.

38 Ibid., p. 74.

39 Ibid., p. 51.

40 Ibid., p. 53.

41 Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, p. 70.

42 Claudius Buchanan, *The Star in the East, a Sermon* (London: s.n. 1809); Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 4th edn (London: 1811); Claudius Buchanan, *An Apology for Promoting Christianity in India* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1813); Claudius Buchanan, *Colonial Ecclesiastical Establishment: Being a Brief View of the State of the Colonies of Great Britain* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1813). For a discussion of the impact of Buchanan's work, see Karen Chancey, 'The Star in the East: The Controversy over Christian Missions to India, 1805–1813', *Historian* 60.3 (1998): 507–22.

43 Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, p. 70.

44 Grant, *Observations*, p. 75.

45 See, for example, Charles Grant to Wilberforce 16 July 1808, Hannah More to Wilberforce, 12 April 1813, in William Wilberforce, Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce* (London: J. Murray, 1840), pp. 132, 240.

46 Wilberforce to Lord Muncaster, ibid., p. 271.

47 William Wilberforce, *Substance of the Speeches of William Wilberforce, Esq. On the Clause in the East India Bill for Promoting the Religious Instruction and Moral Improvement of the Natives of the British Dominions in India, on the 22[n]d of June, and the 1st and 12th of July, 1813* (London: John Hatchard; J. Butterworth; T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1813), pp. 97–100.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., p. 25.
50 Ibid., p. 91.
51 Ibid., p. 53.
52 Ibid., pp. 32, 50.
53 Ibid., pp. 16–17.
54 Ibid., p. 6.
55 Ibid., p. 4.
56 Ibid., p. 91.
57 Ibid., p. 38.
58 Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 4.
59 Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 7.
60 Ibid.
61 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 293.
62 Cited in Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism*, p. 216.
63 For more on Hinduism as it appeared in this periodical literature, see ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 217.
65 Howard L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), cited in Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, p. 94. For more on the editing of missionary letters for inclusion in LMS periodicals, see Johnston, *Missionary Writing*.
66 See Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818–1940* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002).
67 Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*
68 *Missionary Magazine* (June 1858), p. 148.
69 Ibid. (Mar. 1858), p. 58.
70 Cited in Brian Stanley, 'Baptists, Anti-Slavery and the Legacy of Imperialism', *Baptist Quarterly* 42 (2007), p. 286.
71 John Marriott, *The Other Empire: Metropolis, India and Progress in the Colonial Imagination* (Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 28.
72 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 300–1.
73 On the different ways in which missionaries wrote about *sati* in publications intended for Britain or India, see Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
74 *Friend of India*, 13 (Serampore: Mission Press, 1823); *Friend of India*, 15 (Serampore: Mission Press, 1825).
75 Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Kingston: University of the West Indies, 1998), p. 32.
76 Seymour Drescher, 'Abolitionist Expectations: Britain', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 41.
77 Marriott, *The Other Empire*, p. 16.

78 Ibid., pp. 18, 33.
79 Ibid., p. 16.
80 David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography* 28: 3 (2004), p. 336.
81 Cited in David Arnold, 'Race, Place and Bodily Difference in Early Nineteenth-Century India', *Historical Research* 77.196 (2004): 225.
82 Ibid., p. 255.
83 Ibid.
84 Cited in Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 19.
85 Sudipta Sen, 'Liberal Government and Illiberal Trade: The Political Economy of "Responsible Government" in Early British India', in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 137.
86 See Sudipta Sen, 'Colonial Aversions and Domestic Desires: Blood, Race, Sex and the Decline of Intimacy in Early British India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 24.1 suppl. 1 (2001): 25–45.
87 Cited in Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, p. 15.
88 Tennant, *Indian Recreations*, p. 135.
89 Cited in Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, p. 19.
90 Cited in Jenny Sharpe, 'The Violence of Light in the Land of Desire; or, How William Jones Discovered India', *Boundary* 2, 20.1 (1993): 39.
91 Claudius Buchanan, *The Works of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan ... Comprising His Christian Researches in Asia ... His Memoir on the Expediency of an Ecclesiastical Establishment for British India, and His Star in the East, with Three New Sermons* (New York: Whiting and Watson, 1812), p. 206. For more on Buchanan, see Chancey, 'The Star in the East'.
92 Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*, p. 137.
93 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 307.
94 *Missionary Notices* (Apr. 1817), pp. 130–1.
95 Claudius Buchanan, *The Star in the East, a Sermon* (London: s.n. 1809), p. 38.
96 *Missionary Notices* (April 1817), p. 131.
97 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 31 (1823).
98 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 307.
99 Buchanan, for example, called caste a 'wretched bondage' and commented that 'Another formidable obstacle to the progress of Christianity in Hindustan, is the distribution of the natives into Castes, and the excessive dread of losing their respective ranks, which universally prevails'. Buchanan, *Memoir*, p. 118
100 Wilberforce, *Substance of the Speeches*, p. 41.
101 Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies', p. 335.
102 Wilberforce, *Substance of the Speeches*, p. 54.
103 Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).
104 For more, see Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).
105 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 11 (1818).
106 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 1 (1816).
107 Lambert and Lester, 'Geographies', p. 331.

108 Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760–1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).
109 Laura M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 6.
110 Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism', p. 303.
111 Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, p. 21.
112 Wilberforce, *Substance of the Speeches*, pp. 47–9.
113 Michael Bell, 'The Cult of Sentiment and the Culture of Feeling', in Jürgen Schlaeger (ed.), *Representations of Emotions* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1999), p. 92.
114 Ibid., p. 89.
115 Michel Foucault, cited in Randall McGowen, 'The Body and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Modern History* 59.4 (1987): 652.
116 Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism', p. 308.
117 Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (Oxford University Press, 2002). The sexual components of American abolitionist literature has been discussed by Carol Lasser in 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric', *Journal of the Early Republic* 28.1 (2008): 83–114 and and Ronald G. Walters, 'The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism', *American Quarterly* 25.2 (1973): 177–201. As they demonstrate, there was in some cases a fine line between abolitionist literature and soft-core pornography with vaguely anti-slavery themes.
118 Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism', p. 304.
119 Jamie L. Bronstein, *Caught in the Machinery: Workplace Accidents and Injured Workers in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 72.
120 Henrice Altink, '"An Outrage on All Decency": Abolitionist Reactions to Flogging Jamaican Slave-women, 1780–1834', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 23.2 (2002): 107–22.
121 Grant, *Observations*, p. 29.
122 Ibid., p. 61.
123 Bell, 'The Cult of Sentiment', p. 90.
124 *Missionary Notices* (Apr. 1817), p. 131.
125 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 7 (1817).
126 Monika Fludernik, 'Suttee Revisited: From the Iconography of Martyrdom to the Burkean Sublime', *New Literary History* 30.2 (1999): 411–37.
127 Fludernik, 'Suttee Revisited', p. 430.
128 Jeanette Herman, 'Men and Women of Feeling: Conventions of Sensibility and Sentimentality in the Sati Debate and Mainwaring's the Suttee', *Comparative Literature Studies* 42.2 (2005): 226.
129 Ibid., p. 238.
130 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 23 (1821).
131 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 36 (1824).
132 Ibid.
133 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 15 (1819).
134 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 38 (1825).
135 For a detailed account of hook-swinging, see Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Popular Religion, Elites, and Reform: Hook-Swinging and its Prohibition in Colonial India, 1800–1894* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995).
136 *Missionary Notices* (Sept. 1818), pp. 261

137 Ibid., pp. 261–2.

138 John Gabriel Stedman, Richard Price and Sally Price (eds), *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery* (London: Darton, Harvey and Darton, 1837). For a Discussion of Stedman's narrative in the context of 'humanitarian pornography', see Mario Klarer, 'Humanitarian Pornography: John Gabriel Stedman's Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam (1796)', *New Literary History* 36.4 (2005): 559–87 and Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*.

139 Altink, 'An Outrage on All Decency', p. 107.

140 For more on the evangelical mobilisation of women against both slavery and *sati*, see Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790–1865* (London: Routledge, 2007).

141 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 314.

142 William Ward, *Farewell Letters to a Few Friends in Britain and America, on Returning to Bengal, in 1821* (London: Black, Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, 1821), pp. 74–5.

143 Ibid., p. 65.

144 Dubois, *Description*, p. 146. Dubois also commented that the precepts of the 'Padma Purana' on the conduct of married women 'seem intended to reduce the women to a state of the most abject slavery'. In particular he noted that the custom, practised among some castes in south India, of forbidding a young bride to speak in the presence of her mother-in-law was 'a contrivance well adapted for securing domestic tranquillity, dearly purchased, however, by degrading the most useful and interesting portion of the fair sex into the condition of slaves', adding that the older women usually treated the new brides in an 'extremely harsh and domineering manner', because they looked on them 'as slaves purchased with money' (p. 235).

145 Verus, 'On the Character of Female Society in India', *Asiatic Journal* 12 (1821): 22.

146 Priscilla Chapman, *Hindoo Female Education* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1839), p. 12. For more on Chapman's text, see D. W. Savage, 'Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India', *Gender & History* 9.2 (1997): 201–21.

147 Chapman, *Hindoo Female Education*, p. 26.

148 Ibid., p. 65.

149 See, for example, Mary Weitbrecht, *The Women of India and Christian Work in the Zenana* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1875).

150 Wilberforce, 'Letter to a Friend', p. 265.

151 Jamie Bronstein notes that this sentimental emphasis on families torn apart was also observable in accounts of industrial accidents in the early nineteenth century. Bronstein, *Caught in the Machinery*, pp. 61–3.

152 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 16, issue 395 (22 Sept. 1791).

153 For more on infanticide in India, see Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Satadru Sen, 'The Savage Family: Colonialism and Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century India', *Journal of Women's History* 14.3 (2002): 53–79.

154 *Quarterly Missionary Paper* 26 (1822).

155 Ward, *Farewell Letters*, p. 82.

156 *Calcutta Journal* (5 Dec. 1820). There are, of course, considerable problems with the idea of 'voluntary' *sati*, and feminist historians now question how far the widow was

ever able to exercise her free will in these situations, either in the colonial past or in more recent *sati* cases. For more on this complex issue, see Major, *Pious Flames*; Ania Loomba, 'Dead Women Tell No Tales: Issues of Female Subjectivity, Subaltern Agency and Tradition in Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings on Window Immolation in India', *History Workshop Journal* 36.1 (1993): 209–27.

157 *The Times* (3 Sept. 1811).

158 For an overview, see Liese M. Perrin, 'Resisting Reproduction: Reconsidering Slave Contraception in the Old South', *Journal of American Studies* 35.2 (2001): 255–74. Slave reproduction rates in the Americas varied, with low rates being characteristic of harsh sugar plantation regimes in the British West Indies and Brazil, while higher birth rates were observed in parts of the American South, especially Virginia, where cultivation of the dominant tobacco crop was less arduous and planters more solicitous of the natural increase of their property. See Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, 2 vols (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1997), i. 179–80.

159 Barbara Bush-Slimani, 'Hard Labour: Women, Childbirth and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies', *History Workshop* 36 (1993): 95.

160 Wilberforce, 'Letter to a Friend', pp. 270–1.

161 Mrs Phelps, *The Suttee, and Other Poems* (Oxford: H. Bradford, 1831), pp. 19–20.

162 *Calcutta Journal* (5 Dec. 1820).

163 *Missionary Notices* (June 1819), p. 83.

164 Altink, 'An Outrage on All Decency', p. 111.

165 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 304.

166 See Midgley, *Feminism and Empire.*

167 Herman, 'Men and Women of Feeling', p. 243.

168 Ibid., p. 235.

169 To adapt Gayatri Spivak's famous phrase.

170 Herman, 'Men and Women of Feeling', p. 224.

171 William Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India; in a Series of Letters to T. F. Buxton, Esq.* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1840), p. 2.

172 Buchanan, *The Works of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan*, p. 342.

173 Ibid., p. 179.

8

'The Produce of the East by Free Men': Indian Sugar and Indian Slavery in British Abolitionist Debates, 1793–1833

In 1829, George Saintsbury published a pamphlet entitled *East India Slavery*, in which he provided a shocking expose of 'unfree labour' in British India, declaring, 'throughout India slavery prevails; India is therefore a slave territory, as Jamaica is a slave colony'.[1] His 'humanitarian' efforts to awaken public sympathy for the sufferings of poor East Indian slaves met with a hostile response in the pages of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, however, for Saintsbury was not a campaigning philanthropist, missionary or abolitionist, but an active member of the West Indian Association. His exposé of Indian labour conditions was not designed to further the cause of universal 'anti-slavery' but rather to undermine emerging attempts on the part of abolitionists and East India commercial interests to position India as a 'free-labour' alternative to the West Indian slave system. To this end he used recently published East India Company records to demonstrate the existence of slavery in India and highlight the fortunate position of the 'pampered Negro slave' compared with that of the average poverty-stricken East Indian peasant. Given Saintsbury's obvious agenda, it is perhaps not surprising that the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* did not immediately rally to the cause of East Indian slaves, but rather attacked Saintsbury for 'wilful and deliberate misrepresentation' of the facts.[2] On this occasion, as on others when the idea of 'unfree' labour in India intersected with abolitionist discourses, their treatment of the issue was ambivalent. Unable to deny the existence of slavery in India altogether, yet unwilling to incorporate it into their campaign, they primarily sought to marginalise and excuse those forms of bondage found in India as mild, primarily domestic and, most importantly, in no way connected to the production of the 'free-grown' East India sugar that they championed as part of their campaign.

The previous chapter discussed how metaphors of slavery, bondage and oppression functioned within popular evangelical depictions of Indian society

and religion, and helped both to normalise colonial control and to justify Christian proselytisation. This chapter goes on to look at how ideas about 'free' and 'unfree' labour in the subcontinent intersected with and informed metropolitan debates about how to exploit India's potential for colonial commodity production. In particular, it explores how India functioned within emerging discourses that linked the humanitarian impetus for the abolition of slavery to wider economic debates about free labour and free trade in the early nineteenth century, which reflected the interests not only of abolitionists but also of private venture capitalists desirous of breaking into the Indian market after the EIC monopoly ended in 1813.[3] It will look first at the symbolic importance of India and Indian produce, especially sugar, in abolitionist campaigns, and then at the discursive treatment of Indian labour conditions by East and West Indian lobbyists and sympathisers.

Perhaps because most historians have assumed, with Howard Temperley, that prior to 1833 abolitionists were 'so preoccupied with West Indian slavery that the very existence of slavery in the East Indies had largely escaped their notice', East Indian slavery has made little impact on the existing historiography of the anti-slavery movement.[4] Many studies ignore India, except as an alternative source of sugar, cotton and other products.[5] Even David Brion Davis's detailed study of James Cropper—an abolitionist and East Indian trader who made direct connections between East Indian labour and abolitionism—dismisses East Indian slavery in a single footnote, despite its frequent appearance in the writing of Cropper's West Indian critics.[6] Most historians who do discuss slavery in India explain its marginality in abolitionist debates by reminding us that it was both a milder institution than that of the West Indies and a deeply embedded cultural and religious custom with origins in pre-colonial Indian social structures rather than colonial practice. As such, they argue, it posed no immediate challenge to abolitionist ideology. 'Slavery in India was a very different proposition to slavery in the New World', Howard Temperley maintains, 'in that it was an institution that the British had inherited … rather than one that they had themselves created. The existence of slavery in India stirred no sense of national guilt or impulse to remedy past wrongs in the way that West Indian slavery did.'[7] These explanations resonate both with colonial constructions of 'benign' Indian slavery discussed in earlier chapters and with the declarations of abolitionists themselves: 'There is a difference', Zachary Macaulay asserted in 1823, 'between the slavery of the East and West, that of the latter we ourselves are the sole authors, and are chargeable, therefore, with its whole guilt and turpitude. In the East, whatever slavery exists we found there; we did not ourselves create it: it was the fruit of Pagan, Mahometan, or Portuguese rule.'[8] Such interpretations acted as a rationale for inaction on a subject that was considered an inconvenient distraction. Peter Gordon, in

an 1837 letter on the subject of East Indian slavery, lamented that in the 1820s abolitionists 'repeatedly objected to bring forward the subject of slavery in India on the ground that it would interfere with the abolition of negro slavery in the West Indies', noting that when the issue was raised the speaker was denounced 'as an enemy to abolition'.[9]

This chapter argues that emphasis on the qualitative difference between East and West Indian slavery in both abolitionist discourse and subsequent historiography functions to conceal the significant challenges that the former presented to the wider imperatives, strategies and world view of the abolitionist movement, as it coalesced in the 1820s with commercial interests in East India trade. The sometimes contradictory coalitions fostered by the conjunction of Evangelical fervour and organisation with commodity and profit have, of course, been a recurrent theme in abolitionist historiography and reflect the complex relationship between humanitarian ideologies and the conscious or unconscious imperatives of the emerging capitalist middle class from among which many anti-slavery leaders were drawn.[10] Eric Williams has famously noted the personal involvement of several leading abolitionists in East India trade and suggested that they were concerned as much with the 'unprofitableness of West Indian monopoly' as with the 'inhumanity of West Indian slavery'.[11] Whatever their motivations, by the 1820s, many abolitionists had become invested ideologically, and in some cases literally, in the idea that India provided a potential alternative site of imperial production that would undercut the slave system through the use of free labour. The domestic movement to use 'free-grown' East India sugar, the campaign for the equalisation of the sugar duties, and wider economic debates about the benefits of harnessing and developing East Indian production potential marked a convergence between abolitionists strategies and new commercial interests, but all relied upon the assumption that East Indian labour was fundamentally 'free'. Suggestions to the contrary threatened the very foundations on which the idea of an imperial 'free-labour' future based on Indian commodities and Indian markets was constructed. As a result, rather than attack Indian slavery in its various forms, abolitionists initially sought primarily only to distance it from Indian commodity production, and especially from the cultivation and processing of East Indian sugar, and hence from their campaign. The relationship between East India sugar, East India trade and abolitionism thus provides an important context for understanding abolitionist ambivalence towards Indian slavery, as well as demonstrating the ways in which humanitarianism and anti-slavery sentiment were intersected by pragmatic political and economic considerations.

'Reasons for using East India sugar': abstentionism and East India trade

Sugar, once a coveted exotic luxury, remained an upper-class and middle-class indulgence in the late eighteenth century, although it increasingly became a proletarian necessity during the industrial revolution.[12] Its use became highly symbolically loaded during the abolitionist period and drinking tea unsweetened became a political act in abolitionist circles.[13] Although growing sentiment against using slave produce dated back to the 1780s, if not earlier, the public campaign to abstain from the use of slave-grown sugar really took off 1791, with the publication of Baptist abolitionist William Fox's pamphlet *An Address to the People of Great Britain*. Motivated by the failure of petitioning, Fox argued that if the government would not take action to end the slave trade people must intervene by putting economic pressure on planters to switch to a system of free labour and trade in free-grown produce.[14] Fox's pamphlet was extremely influential and his ideas, arguments and imagery were widely known and imitated in the 1790s.[15] Although the public abstentionist campaign, like the Abolitionist movement itself, petered off as the threat from revolutionary France grew, it was revived in the 1820s, when abolitionists made renewed efforts to see slavery abolished altogether.[16]

The campaigns against West Indian sugar had important social, political and moral, as well as economic, implications. As David Brion Davis points out, abstentionism had 'subversive implications that threatened to undercut government's control of abolitionism'.[17] It echoed both existing strategies of political and economic resistance (such as the American boycott of tea prior to the American Revolution) and wider discourses about luxury and artificiality that informed mercantilist debates about consumption and over-consumption, evangelical and revolutionary rejections of self-indulgence, decadence and extravagance.[18] Clare Midgeley notes that the very use of the word 'abstention' laid emphasis on self-denial and carried connotations of the moral righteousness of renouncing sin.[19] As British orientalist and EIC official Sir William Jones put it in a speech penned in 1780,

> Sugar, it has been said, would be dear if it were not worked by Blacks in the Western islands … but let sugar be as dear as it may, it is better to eat none, to eat honey, if sweetness only be palatable; better to eat aloes or coloquintida, than violate a primary law of nature, impressed on every heart not imbruted by avarice, than rob one human creature of those eternal rights, of which no law upon earth can justly deprive him.

Symbolically, abstentionism drew its force from the metaphorical equation of West Indian sugar with slave blood and torment (Fig. 10); a relationship that Timothy Morton calls the 'blood sugar topos'.[20] This connection was

Figure 10. 'Barbarities in the West Indies'.

extensively played out in abolitionist literature; as one poem in the *Scots Magazine* for 1788 put it, 'Are drops of blood the horrible manure/That fills with luscious juice the teeming cane?'.[21] Abstentionism emphasised both individual guilt of supporting slavery through the consumption of this 'blood-bought luxury' and individual responsibility to contribute to a moral cause by modifying ones own behaviour. 'Let us individually bring this great question closely to our own bosoms,' the ladies of the Peckham Ladies' African and Anti-Slavery Association were admonished. 'If we purchase the commodity we participate in the crime.'[22] Consumers were encouraged to empathise with the slave and draw direct connections between his suffering and their own actions in consuming contaminated produce:

> As he sweetens his tea, let him reflect on the bitterness at the bottom of his cup. Let him bring the subject home to his heart, and say, as he truly may, this lump cost the poor slave a groan, and this a bloody stroke with the cartwhip; and this, perhaps worn down by fatigue and wretchedness and despair, he sunk under his misery and died! And then let him swallow his beverage with what appetite he may.[23]

Boycotting West India sugar played an important role in mobilising support for the abolitionist campaign. It was a simple action that could be

undertaken by men but also by women and children, increasing the social inclusiveness of the movement and bringing the political campaign into the domestic realm (Fig. 11). It allowed the abolitionists to harness the emerging power of consumerism and especially of women as the controllers of domestic consumption. By emphasising women's moral authority and also their practical authority over the domestic economies of their homes, abstentionism demonstrated that the decision to consume or not to consume could involve ethical assumptions and could change social conditions in far-flung colonies. Abstentionism invested women with a power that extended beyond the domestic sphere.[24] Women became actively involved in the anti-saccharite movement, organising abstention on a community-wide scale. Those of higher social rank were encouraged to use their 'fashionable influence', while on a practical level women canvassed and went door to door. In the 1790s, women's involvement was primarily individual, although in 1791 in Lincoln a group of 'oeconomical and public spirited ladies' collected signatures to an agreement not to use sugar.[25] In the 1820s, such canvassing, together with the dissemination of anti-slavery literature, was more systematically organised. Attempts were made to compile comprehensive regional

ANTI-SACCHARRITES, - or - JOHN BULL and his Family leaving off the use of SUGAR.
To the Masters & Mistresses of Families in Great Britain, this Noble Example of OECONOMY, is respectfully submitted.
O my dear Creatures, do but Think it!
You can't think how nice it is without Sugar
Just Fancy how much Work you'll save
Besides Remembering by leaving off the use of it
all remember how much sickness it will save
poor Papa! - O its charming cooling Drink
O delicious! delicious!
Pub.d March 27th 1792 by H Humphrey

Figure 11. 'Anti-Saccharites, or John Bull and his Family leaving off the use of Sugar'.

lists and a national directory of abstainers, with the intention of publicising the cause, showing the large number of abstainers, and encouraging healthy competition between societies in recruiting converts to the cause.[26] Although figures for the number of abstainers are not available, Clare Midgely estimates that the systematic nature of the 1820s campaign probably resulted in more abstainers than in 1787–93.[27]

The relationship between abstentionism and East India sugar began in the 1790s. During the preceding century no sugar had been commercially imported from India into Britain, but when massive slave uprisings in the French Caribbean led to a sharp hike in the cost of sugar, commercial attention turned to India. Indian sugar production, it was thought, might relieve the immediate shortage and lessen Britain's dependence on slave produce.[28] Initially, East Indian sugar seemed commercially viable, with one newspaper reporting in 1792 that a projected cost, once refined, of about two shillings a pound 'would be sufficient inducement to import from the East Indies without any alteration to the duty'.[29] Despite such optimistic predictions, the EIC was reluctant dramatically to increase sugar production—discouraged by difficult growing and processing conditions in India, their failure to compete in European markets and the protective tariffs and restrictions favouring West Indian sugar enshrined in the Navigation Acts. The EIC was also wary of private entrepreneurs, especially those it considered of questionable race or class backgrounds, and it provided, at best, patchy support for efforts to increase production of various commodities, including sugar—tightly controlling European settlement and enterprise. Thus, despite some abortive attempts by private entrepreneurs to establish sugar plantations using West Indian technologies in India in the 1790s, and again in the late 1830s to 1840s, the majority of Indian sugar production continued to be carried out by small-scale, peasant cultivators, selling to Indian refiners who produced low-grade sugar in relatively small quantities. Importantly, although these peasant cultivators may in some cases have been bound by various forms of socio-economic obligation, including debt, they were considered free labourers, not slaves (Fig. 12).[30]

Despite limits on production, some enterprising East India merchants saw a market opportunity to exploit abolitionist sentiment by presenting 'free-grown' East India sugar as an ethically sound alternative to slave produce. In the early 1790s, advertisements for East India sugar appeared that emphasised its consumption as a blow against West Indian slavery. In India, the *Calcutta Gazette* noted the trend, announcing that

> EAST INDIA SUGAR may soon be expected to become a profitable Article in the English markets—the spirit of the times will serve not a little to the encouragement of this new object of Trade. A Philanthropic

Figure 12. Workers crushing sugar cane (c.1822).
In the background, workers are boiling down the juice.

> SHOP-KEEPER has already availed himself of the favourable disposition of the moment—and advertises in large Capitals 'EAST INDIA SUGAR! MADE WITHOUT SLAVES!!' and does not forget to add SOLD by A. B. & CO. No 45, &c. As a further recommendation to his Ware, he concludes 'IT is a well-known Fact, that an increasing Number of respectable Persons have declined the use of West India Sugar, because it is raised at the Expense of the Blood and Misery of our Fellow Creatures, thereby giving a Proof of the Sincerity of their Abhorrence of a System of Cruelty and Oppression, which has hardly been equalled in the Annals of Mankind.' It seems not improbable that the Spirit of an enlightened and generous People, by adopting this Measure, of substituting the Die of East India Sugar, which is made by Freemen, will effect the Abolition of Slavery, and the Slave Trade, which otherwise does not seem likely to be accomplished.[31]

Back in London, the *Morning Chronicle* carried a notice from Smith and Leaper of Bishopgate Street announcing the sale of 'East India Sugar made by Free People'. 'The public may depend', the advertisement declared,

> upon the above not being adulterated with West India Sugar … Smith and Leaper, having already experienced considerable encouragement in the sale of East India Sugar … declare that they shall persevere herein, not doubting that the cause they have espoused, which is no less than the cause of Freedom, will in a Free Country like this, prevail over the cause of Slavery.[32]

Clare Midgeley suggests that women, who were responsible for household

purchases, put consumer pressure on retailers for ethical goods, resulting in some merchants stocking East India sugar in the 1790s.[33] They put similar pressure on retailers in the 1820s, withdrawing custom from those who sold or used West India sugar and favouring East India produce. In Dublin, lists of importers of 'free-grown' East India sugar were published and women's anti-slavery societies across the country joined the call for its use. The Peckham Ladies' African and Anti Slavery Association published a pamphlet entitled *Reasons for Using East India Sugar* in 1828, in which it declared that this simple act undermined slavery in 'the safest, most easy, and effectual manner in which it can be done',[34] while the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society handed out cards bearing the information that 'by six families using East India sugar, one less slave is required'[35]—a motto which was also printed on sugar bowls (Fig. 13).[36] Using East India sugar as a replacement for slave produce was also directly endorsed by the London Anti-Slavery Society, which set up a temporary depot for its sale in August 1824 and advanced James Heywood £171 to finance another a month later. Anti-slavery leaders encouraged their friends to buy Heywood's sugar, assuring them that it was the product of free labour.[37] Although the production and importation of East India sugar never reached levels to challenge the West Indies, its use was invested with important symbolic value, publicising the wider campaign against slavery, fostering a sense of community among abolitionists and keeping the iniquity of slavery in the forefront of people's minds through the daily performance of abstention.[38] Under these circumstances, any suggestion that East Indian sugar was contaminated, even indirectly, by the scourge of slavery, would have been extremely damaging to the symbolic utility of the movement.

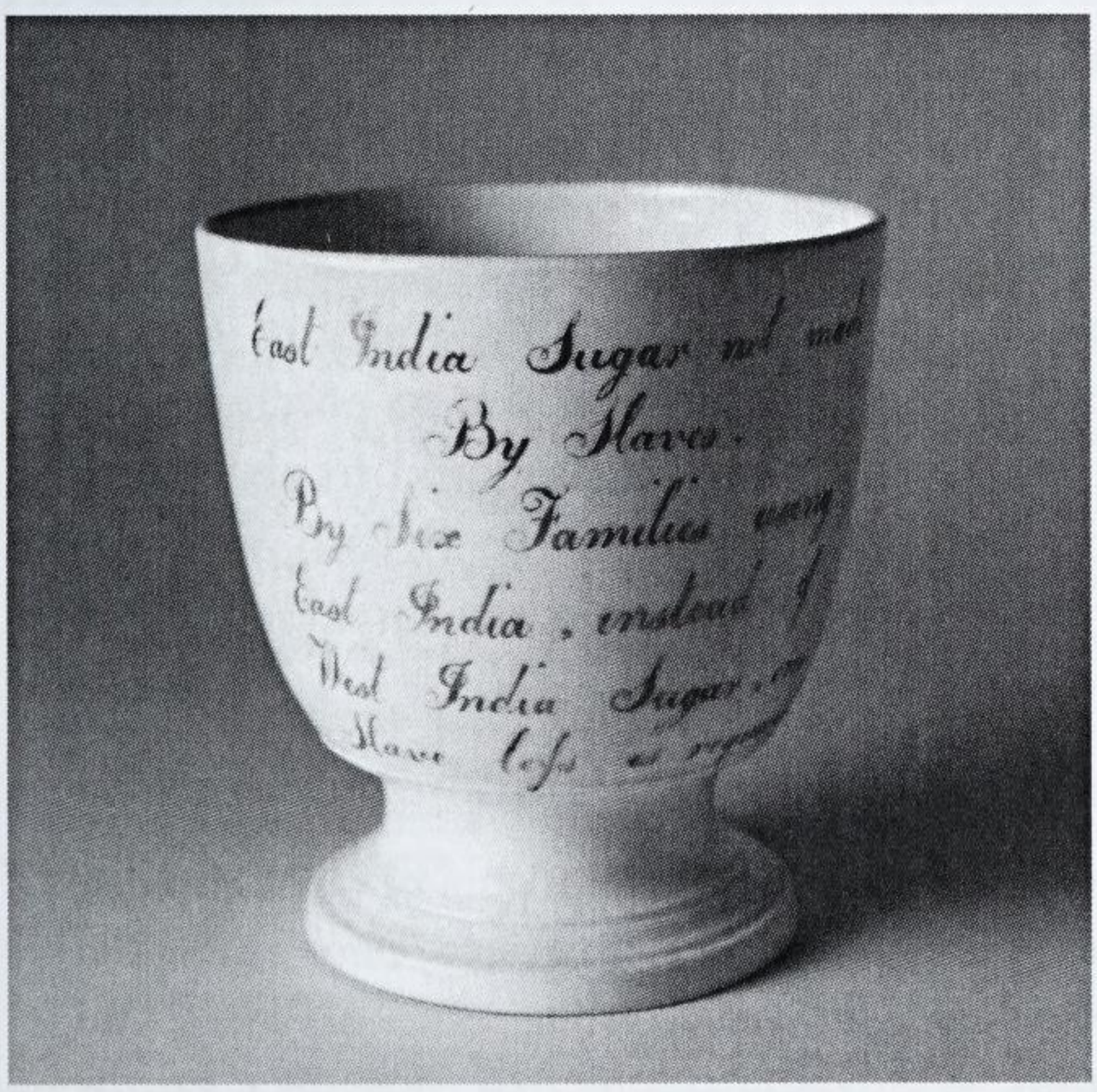

Figure 13. Anti-slavery sugar bowl promoting East India sugar.

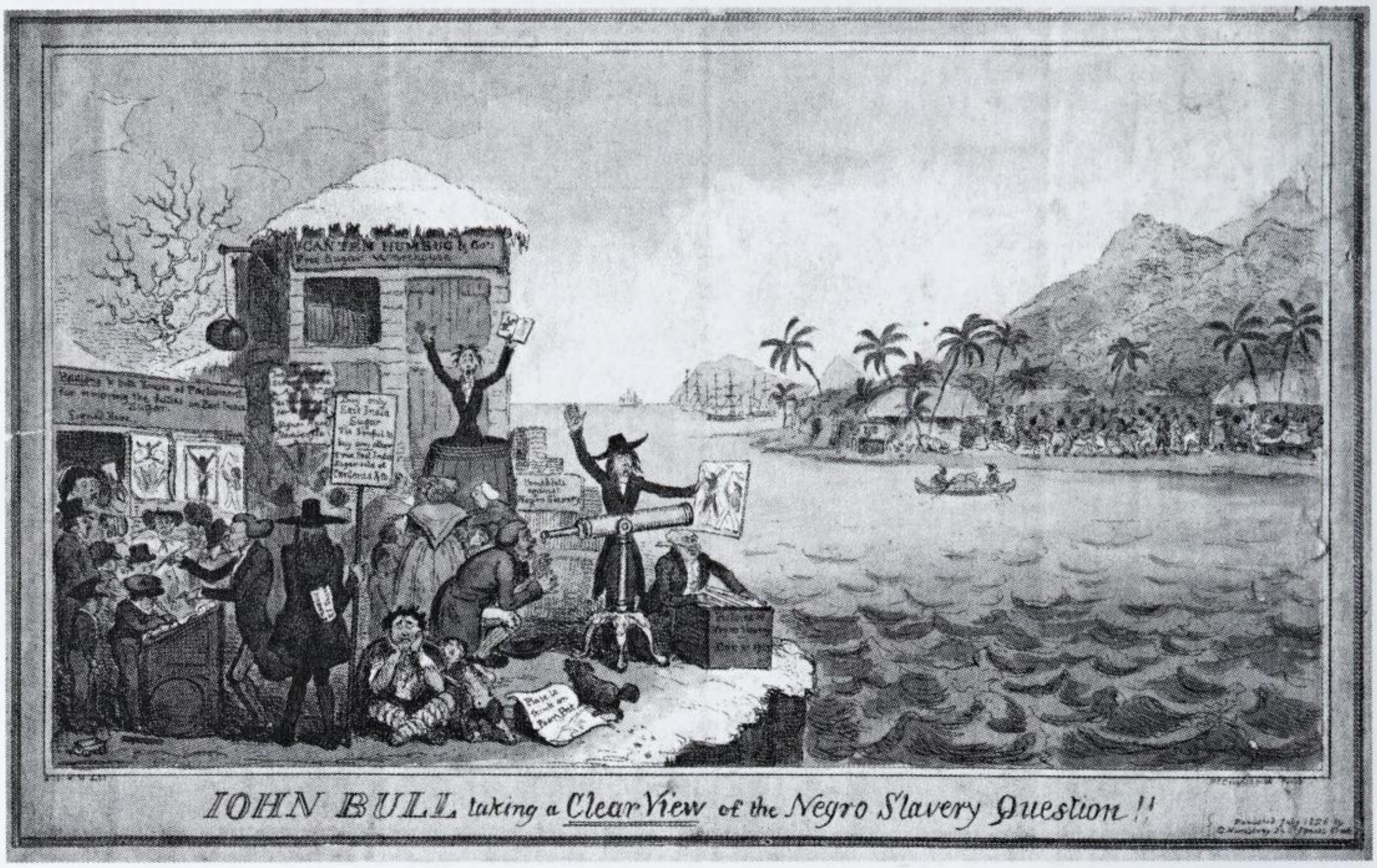

Figure 14. 'John Bull taking a Clear View of the Negro Slavery Question'.

The potential commercial relationship between East Indian trade and the abolitionist promotion of East India sugar did not go unnoticed and was parodied by George Cruikshank in his 1826 cartoon 'John Bull taking a clear view of the Negro slavery question' (Fig. 14). In this cartoon, John Bull's view of idyllic slave life on the distant shore is obscured by an abolitionist holding up a fabricated image of slave torture while another puritanical black-clad evangelical holds a sign denouncing the use of any but 'free-grown' East India sugar. Sticking out of his back pocket, however, is an invoice from the EIC. In the background is Cantem, Humbug & Co. Free Sugar Warehouse, while to the left of the picture people line up to sign the petition for the equalisation of the sugar duties. An anonymous pamphlet, *To the Consumers of Sugar*, which appeared in 1825, made similar points, warning 'Attempts are now [being made], by *interested* people, to induce you to purchase Sugar, produced, as it is alleged, by free labourers in the East, and to abandon the use of that which is raised upon our plantations in the British West India Colonies'. The author concluded his remarks, which are discussed in more detail below, with an appeal to consumer loyalty:

> Traders in East India Sugar, conscious that its quality, strength and price cannot give it an advantageous competition with the sugars of our Colonies, are anxious to help it off by an appeal to moral feeling; and, once embarked in the selfish struggle, they disregard the sacred obligations of truth, and would, if they could, sacrifice the West India colonies to their own narrow

interests. But you will not be misled by them: you will see the falsity of their pretensions, and the mischief of their object; you will not encourage a purpose which, while it assumes the gloss of humanity to the Negroes, would disable their masters from feeding, clothing, protecting and imparting religious instruction to them; and would condemn to ruin and integral part of this empire, greatly influential on its wealth, commerce, manufactures and naval strength, in order to afford a needless aid to distant provinces, not settled or peopled by British subjects, and whose prosperity has little connection with our own. Be not, then, led away by specious arguments, which want the solid ground of truth. If those who advance them could succeed in banishing West India Sugar from our tables, we must soon pay double the price for a worse article. Continue to sweeten your tea and your fruit with that sugar which goes farthest, and is cheapest and best; and when any cunning dealer attempts to seduce you from the OLD SHOP, under the pretence of selling you 'Free Sugar', tell him that 'you are not to be made the dupes of that humbug![39]

Thus, although there is no evidence that the abstention campaigns had any direct impact on the level of West Indian sugar imports,[40] it is clear that the campaign, and the concurrent calls for an equalisation of the sugar duties, disconcerted West India interests and set the frame for debates not only about free- and unfree-labour conditions, but about the rights and privileges of different colonies and the focus and meaning of empire.

'The products of the East by free men': sugar duties, abolitionism and East India trade

As Cruikshank so keenly satirised, the use of East India sugar and wider debates about the duties imposed upon it marked a significant point of intersection between the abolitionist campaign and East India commercial interests. As Charlotte Sussman notes, most supporters of abolitionism were from the metropolitan middle classes and their association with industrialism meant that they generally advocated free trade. Supporters of slavery, on the other hand, were seen as mercantilists whose economic philosophy was a barrier to a more competitive and efficient market economy.[41] This is not to imply, however, that any 'grand coalition of new economic interests' was the main cause of abolitionist success in 1807 or 1833. As Seymour Drescher points out, 'before emancipation all metropolitan abolitionist attempts … to form a coalition of East Indians, British industrialists, free traders, consumers and abolitionists against the plantation slave system monopoly fell far short of abolitionist hopes or expectations.'[42] Although the two sometimes overlapped, the relationship between the EIC, private East India traders and abolitionists was riven with tensions. Despite the

successful use some East India merchants made of anti-slavery rhetoric to promote their produce, the EIC did not overtly support abolitionism or directly challenge West Indian dominance of the domestic sugar trade. Peter Marshall's analysis of parliamentary voting patterns suggests that many 'East Indian' MPs supported the interests of other colonies and voted against the abolition of both slavery and the slave trade; until the 1820s, the orthodoxy remained that India and the Caribbean were complementary and not competing units of empire.[43] Initially, as we have seen, abolitionists and evangelicals were equally ambivalent about the morality of EIC rule in India, which at moments could be the subject of almost as much public controversy as the slave trade.[44]

India's emergence as a potential alternative site of imperial production relied on the assumption that it was uncontaminated by the taint of slavery.[45] Seymour Drescher notes that abolitionists knew 'from the beginning that the least controversial way to end both the slave trade and the slave system of production was to supply sugar grown by free labourers *at a cheaper rate*',[46] resulting in calls to explore the possibility of producing staples in India, using free labour, at prices which must undercut slavery in the Americas.[47] The preferential treatment given to West India sugar by the Navigation Acts undermined India's commercial competitiveness, however, causing abolitionists and East Indian interests to unite in calling for the equalisation of duties. Their protective tariffs were jealously guarded by the West Indian lobby, who vociferously rejected any equalisation of the terms of trade. They claimed that the EIC's monopoly gave it an unfair advantage in the imperial market and another privilege might lead to its domination of tropical trade, to the detriment of colonies and consumers.[48] The government agreed, refusing to alter the West Indies' mercantilist advantage, even though they, rather than East Indies, were economically dominant in the late eighteenth century.[49] Despite early abolitionist attempts to locate it as a viable alternative, the idea of significantly expanding East India sugar production, and of equalising the duties on East and West Indian sugar, waned in the last decade before abolition and in 1807 East India sugar accounted for only 2 per cent of North Atlantic consumption.[50] Like the abstentionist campaign, however, it regained prominence in the 1820s.[51]

Seymour Drescher argues that renewed abolitionist focus on India as a 'free-labour' alternative to West Indian slavery in the 1820s arose not from the revived anti-slavery campaign, marked by the first parliamentary test of emancipation in 1823, but from the economic imperatives of the simultaneous sugar duty debates.[52] Clare Midgeley, however, suggests that the campaigns to equalise sugar duties and to abolish slavery were intertwined; indeed, she refers to a two-pronged national campaign in which women promoted abstentionism, while men's anti-slavery auxiliaries petitioned

parliament over the sugar duties.[53] Certainly, many speeches on slave emancipation in the 1820s, such as that given by James Losh in Newcastle in March 1824, included direct references to the sugar duties.[54] Not that all 'free traders' were abolitionists, of course. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce and some Liverpool and London merchants who repeatedly petitioned parliament in favour of the equalisation of sugar duties in the 1820s also supported the removal of duties on slave-grown sugar from Brazil in the 1840s. Even committed abolitionists saw the issue as one of markets as well as humanitarianism; if Indian peasants could earn more producing sugar for the home market, they could spend more buying surplus manufactures exported from Britain.[55] As James Cropper put it, 'if the duty on sugar was removed, the native of India would be able to procure five pieces of British calico in return for the sugar which his labour, if applied to cultivation, would produce, in the time which manufacturing one piece of such calico would take in India.'[56]

Despite their differing motivations, the sugar duties issue represented a point of convergence for abolitionist, consumer and East Indian economic interests, as anti-slavery rhetoric was harnessed to economic demands for improved conditions for East India trade. Consumers paid £2 million to subsidise West Indian sugar. The equalisation of duties, it was hoped, would reinvigorate Indian commerce, which was suffering from the loss of its cotton sector, reduce the cost of sugar for the consumer and encourage the West Indians to reform their inefficient production model and end slavery.[57] Instrumental in linking abolitionist discourse with economic arguments about 'free trade' was James Cropper, a Liverpool-based East India trader, a Quaker and 'fervent disciple of Adam Smith'.[58] Cropper was the head of Cropper, Benson and Company, Liverpool's largest importer of East Indian sugar. After meeting anti-slavery leaders William Allen and Thomas Clarkson in 1816, he began to see 'important relations between slavery and free trade, between economic expansion and human progress towards universal freedom'.[59] In May 1821, he laid out his vision in a letter to William Wilberforce: 'On the opening of the East India trade', he wrote, 'I believed that a great experiment was about to be tried—that of a free competition between the products of the East by *free men*, and those of the West by *slaves*.'[60] Fired by the idea that his own personal interest in East Indian sugar might contribute to the downfall of slavery, Cropper campaigned vigorously to make Smith's principles of competition a key catalyst for the abolition of slavery, arguing that incremental legal and administrative pressure were insufficient, and turning instead to economic science and the free market to demonstrate the superiority of free labour in India.[61] For Cropper, free labour and free trade were 'the divinely appointed engines of moral progress' by which the West Indians and their slave system would be undermined.[62]

He emphasised the cost efficiency of hired labour in India, 'being persuaded that cultivation by free men, in the country of their birth, must be cheaper than by the transportation of slaves from Africa to the West Indies',[63] and argued that 'fair competition' between sugar importers would lower that commodity's price in Britain, improve the condition of West Indian slaves and hasten their emancipation. The West India lobby's insistence on protective tariffs was, Cropper maintained, 'a most decided admission that their system of cultivation cannot exist unless the country is taxed to support it … Surely the people of England ought not to be taxed by keeping up the price of an article which may tend to support this infamous traffic?'[64]

Cropper's own vested interest in East India trade has made his espousal of economic tactics for undercutting slavery extremely controversial. L. J. Ragatz suggests that Cropper was 'one of those occasional cases in which conduct is not primarily influenced by self-interest although they may accidentally coincide'.[65] Others have been less kind. Eric Williams, for example, believed that Cropper was more interested in the West Indian monopoly than the conditions of slavery and 'did untold harm to the cause of humanitarianism'.[66] Brion Davis, who studies Cropper in detail, concludes that he was a committed abolitionist, whose role in the formation of the Anti-Slavery Society has been greatly undervalued[67] and that his devotion to the precepts of Adam Smith led him to believe 'fervently in the divinely appointed union of moral progress and commercial expansion'[68] and 'the divinely ordained connection between humanitarianism and East India sugar'.[69] Davis concedes, however, that Cropper's personal economic interest in the trade issues that he promoted as humanitarian causes was problematic and even embarrassing for the abolitionist movement.[70] Despite this, Cropper gained considered influence in the London Anti-Slavery Society and in October 1823 its committee resolved that discussions of the economic objections to slavery, as well as the principled ones, fell within their purview.[71] In 1824, it set up a special committee on East India sugar to promote its sale, tapping into renewed interest in abstentionism and the new emphasis on East India trade that had been sparked with the ending of the EIC's monopoly in 1813. Several pamphlets advocating the promotion of East Indian commodity production appeared, penned by Cropper and others. These highlighted the cheapness of East Indian labour and the economic viability of sugar, cotton and other cultivation. Of course, the relatively low wages paid to Indian labourers had long been known. As early as 1790, the *Calcutta Gazette* had noted the profitable sale of East India sugar at Ostend, and remarked,

> That Sugar should prove an advantageous article of Commerce from hence is not to be wondered at, when the different rates of labour in Bengal and the West India Islands are compared together; by evidence taken before the

> House of Commons, on the investigations on the slave trade, it appeared that the expense of the labour of a slave was from 1*s.* 6*d.* to 2*s.* per diem, whereas in this country the wages of a common *Ryot* does not exceed Two Rupees Eight Annas per month.[72]

In the 1820s, this cheapness was presented as the economic bedrock of the ostensibly moral argument for the expansion of India's commodity sector and provided a precursor for the expansion of East Indian sugar plantations in the 1830s. East Indian sugar production and the circumstances by which it was admitted to the home market thus became a terrain for debates over 'free' and 'unfree' labour, 'free' and 'unfree' trade. Abolitionist James Losh, for example, spelled out the challenge to West Indian planters and slave-holders in a speech in Newcastle in 1824:

> Gentlemen, if you consider slavery to be a good thing—if you think that slaves make better labourers than freemen—you can have not objection to enter into a fair competition with the sugars of the East Indies, as they are not raised by slave labour: if you think your own methods so superior, meet them fairly in the market, and give up those bounties you have hitherto enjoyed?[73]

The convergence of these economic and commercial arguments with abolitionist discourse created a context in which labour conditions in India became an extremely salient issue within the wider debate about slavery, trade and empire.

Although Cropper claimed that he was interested in helping West Indian planters reform an archaic and irrational system, spokesmen for the West India lobby saw him as 'a malicious hypocrite, bent on destroying their lives and property'.[74] In particular, he became embroiled in a vitriolic controversy with John Gladstone—West Indian planter, Liverpool merchant and father of William E. Gladstone—that played out in the pages of the Liverpool press in the autumn of 1823.[75] Gladstone and other members of the West India lobby staunchly defended their right to protective tariffs, arguing that they were themselves denied the benefits of 'free trade' by the Navigation Acts, being required to sell their produce only to Britain, ship it in its raw rather than refined state and buy their manufactured goods and materials only from Britain and British colonies, at much increased prices. Protective tariffs were viewed as recompense for these restrictions.[76] Free trade might appear best in theory, but the long-standing colonial system of protections and restrictions could not simply be dismantled, nor could West Indian planters be expected to bear all the inconvenience of such an experiment: 'East India sugars cannot without a great breach of faith towards the West Indian planters', one writer declared 'be permitted to come at all into competition with

plantation sugars in the home market'.[77] Far from removing the protective tariff on East India sugar, the West Indian lobby maintained that it should be raised even higher to prevent existing encroachments in the domestic market.[78] They rejected the idea that the removal of duties represented free trade and consumer interests, noting that the prohibitory duties on Cuban and Brazilian slave-grown sugar would be left in place. Their most emotive argument, however, was that labour conditions in India were worse than those in the West Indies and that the supposedly 'free-grown' sugar that the abolitionists championed was actually the product of slaves.

'Slaves who are let out like cattle': debates over labour conditions in India

Although historians have questioned their ultimate effectiveness, both abstentionism and the potential equalisation of sugar duties were perceived as serious threats by the West Indian lobby. Abstention from sugar not only appeared to hit sales, but the idea that consumers could make ethical as well as economic choices threatened their mercantilist world view, replacing it with the concept of a free market based on consumer demand.[79] West Indian planters were not helpless, however. They possessed 'well-developed and formalized webs of support' within parliament (through the London-based West India Association) and nationally that they could mobilise to contest abolitionist claims.[80] As a result, attempts were made to undermine the moral superiority of East India sugar. This was done, as we have seen, partly by impugning the motives of those who promoted it. It was also done by questioning the nature of East Indian labour conditions. The anonymous author of the pamphlet *To the Consumers of Sugar*, discussed above, for example, asked his readers to consider how they could be sure that the more expensive East India sugar was truly the produce of free labour. They should ascertain, before they switched supplier, he maintained, in which part of the eastern world the sugar had been produced and under what conditions the labourers had been employed. 'The Sugar which is imported from the British possessions in the East is not all the produce of those parts from which it is imported', he warned'. 'A considerable portion of it, indeed, is not the produce of British India, but of China, Java, Cochin China, and Siam.' He then went on to cite Claudius Buchanan, James Forbes, James Mill, the Abbé Dubois and even William Wilberforce to show that 'the labourers who produce sugar in the East Indies are generally wretched slaves, whose situation, respecting essential comfort and protection, is far inferior, indeed, to that of the negroes of our West India Colonies.'[81] By prompting West India apologists to attack the supposed moral superiority of East Indian

produce, the marketing of East Indian sugar as 'free-grown' created the paradoxical situation in which the most virulent denunciations of East Indian labour conditions and critical exposés of Indian poverty, vulnerability and misery were penned not by evangelicals, missionaries or abolitionists but by West Indian planters.

The British public had long been aware of the apparent poverty of Indian peasants, who, they were told, laboured for 'the very lowest pittance that in a warm climate and a country naturally fertile, will afford the means of preserving and continuing the species'.[82] In the late eighteenth century, it was widely assumed that the Mughal state's super-exploitation of the Indian peasantry had been continued by an equally rapacious EIC.[83] In the 1820s, West Indians drew on this long-standing debate to question whether 'freedom' compensated Indian labourers for exposure to agricultural distress and famine. They accused the EIC of exacerbating 'the oppression and misery of the lower orders',[84] noting that the much vaunted import of British-manufactured cotton had had catastrophic consequences for indigenous textile manufacture and the communities who relied upon it.[85] They also attacked the *zamindari* system—which Wilberforce considered one of the wisest and best systems ever pursued[86]—on the grounds that it impoverished the *ryot*, who 'slaves for the benefit of others without thought of improving his condition or providing for age or infirmity', and the coolie, who laboured alongside him for only 3*d.* sterling a day. 'And this is the system', one writer remarked, 'to which we are referred as so much preferable to that of West India cultivation on the ground of humanity. I confess I do not see any reason for the preference. I have no doubt that the Negroes in our colonies are in a much better situation in respect to the necessaries and conveniences of life than the coolies and perhaps the ryot.'[87] Critics of James Cropper quickly picked up the inherent contradiction in arguments that tied the production of cheap sugar in India to humanitarian interests:

> If it be said that by encouraging the cultivation of sugar under proper regulations the condition of these poor people may be improved, I answer that that would defeat the main object, the production of *cheap* sugar. It is only, I conceive, because the labourers are obliged to work for next to nothing that sugar can be made in the East Indies so cheap as is asserted. However, then, the matter may be debated on political and commercial grounds, let us hear no more of the superior *humanity* of employing labourers at 3*d* per day in the East, rather than slaves in the West, to whom every comfort consistent with their humble position is undoubtedly afforded.[88]

Such comparisons between the conditions of West Indian slaves and the wretched lives of 'free' but underpaid and poverty-stricken Indian peasants echoed long-standing pro-slavery assertions that their slaves were well

treated and better off than sections of the British peasantry: an argument used to counter both abolitionist attacks on slave conditions and their absolute moral preference for 'freedom' at any cost.

Abolitionists countered accusations of Indian peasant distress on two grounds—that descriptions of Indian hardship were exaggerated and that 'freedom' itself outweighed relief from poverty. Old India hands maintained that the Indian peasant's apparent impoverishment did not cause him misery or distress, but rather represented a 'voluntary acceptance of limited material wants'.[89] William Tennant, writing in 1798, commented,

> The labour of all the common people is moderate and their food and cloathing so simple as hardly to admit of degrees … Scarcity here arises often to be famine: while the great body of the people from the benignity of the climate live almost without cloathing, or house for shelter. There is no provision for a time of difficulty: a man who has nothing but his labour to subsist upon, and perhaps does not possess the value of two days provision, is not supposed in distress, and is often actually happy; at least he takes no thought for to-morrow … In every warm country cloathing is less necessary; lodging almost superfluous; hence the people are indolent and improvident to a degree that in your northern climes would prove fatal.[90]

Orientalist assumptions about Indian passivity, idleness, spirituality and the caste system underpinned the idea that 'beyond the attainment of a mere existence, which in this fruitful and genial climate is easily acquired, the mass of inhabitants will never labour for the possession of luxuries, or even what we deem the conveniences of life'.[91] As early as 1796, the cheapness of Indian sugar was explained on the grounds that 'the natives of Bengal have fewer wants and the wages of labour are less'.[92] The cultivation of sugar in Bengal was said to be a 'healthy, voluntary and lucrative employment' by comparison to the expense and suffering incurred by the West Indian system.[93] Abolitionists seem to have accepted this view—even William Wilberforce believed that the condition of the Indian peasantry was 'as comfortable as laws could make it, or as could be expected or desired'.[94]

As Peter Marshall points out, 'Underlying the apparent insensitivity of the abolitionists to Indian poverty was their passionately held conviction that freedom redeemed any material condition, however dire.'[95] The free labourer's reward came from the 'charms of liberty itself'. As Seymour Drescher puts it, 'Freedom softened his toil while it doubled his exertions. After work it secured him his own time, his family, his immunity from arbitrary cruelty. The putative attraction of lower costs of reproduction and security became articles of abolitionist faith.'[96] Even if it could be proved that slaves were materially better off, Wilberforce believed that to consider only 'feeding, cloathing and lodging' was 'degrading man to the level of brutes and

insulting the higher properties of our nature' and denying them the 'dignity of moral agents'.[97] William Cobbett ridiculed what he deemed abolitionist obsession with 'freedom' over the actual human conditions of labour in 1821, saying of the terrible poverty and insecurity of 'free' Indian peasants, 'Aye, say you, but this is not like West India slavery. Here is no property that one man has in another. So, then, as long as this circumstance is wanting, you will not call it slavery.'[98] Cobbett, who had little time for what he termed 'nigger philanthropy', was among many who saw greater need for intervention to improve labour conditions at home before interfering around the world. As Catherine Hall notes, large anti-slavery meetings 'always carried the threat that radicals, who were opposed to anti-slavery on the grounds that it was a deflection from the problems of factory slaves at home, would cause "systematic and disgraceful interruptions"'.[99] In an article denouncing the 'tyranny of farmers over labourers' in Britain, the *Morning Chronicle* noted,

> We are advocates neither for West India slavery nor for East India slavery—we wish to protect no abuse in any part of the world. But this we will say—that there is no one thing from which the poor people of England suffer so much as from the diversion of those whose circumstances render them independent, and who are blessed with leisure, from the domestic affairs of their own country, to intermeddle with the affairs of which they can know hardly anything. It is a great misfortune for our own poor, who are entitled to the attention of those who benefit by their industry, that we have erected ourselves into Censors over nations in the world, and know how every country should be managed but our own. One of the greatest curses entailed on us by our Colonial System is, that we are pestered with affairs which we can never understand, and obliged to withdraw the attention we owe to our own people to the people of remote regions.[100]

A later *Punch* cartoon captioned 'Telescopic Philanthropy' (1865) captured this mood. It showed Britannia gazing through her telescope at the distant colonial shore, oblivious to the little soot-covered street urchins who pulled at her skirts and asked 'ain't we black enough to be cared for?'. Of course, debates about Indian labour conditions can only be fully understood in the context of changing British class and labour relationships as the industrial revolution took hold. As we have already noted, evangelicals were also concerned with the benighted moral condition of the British industrial working class, if not with their material condition. The implications of a free market and wage labour were still being worked out in this period and debates about idealised Indian peasant production spoke directly to concerns closer to home. As a social force, anti-slavery was, as David Brion Davis points out, 'a highly selective response to labour exploitation. It provided an outlet for demonstrating Christian concern for human suffering

and injustice, and yet thereby gave a certain moral insulation to economic activities less visibly dependent on human suffering and injustice.'[101]

Both the use of East India sugar and economic arguments in favour of East India trade relied on the basic assumption that labour in India, however cheap, was essentially 'free'. In the 1820s, however, information about forms of 'unfree' labour in India had reached the public domain and was used to attack abolitionist arguments on the specific charge that there was not only poverty, but actual slavery, in India. William Cobbett, a vociferous critic of Cropper, cited Francis Buchanan at length to show that 'East India sugar is raised by slaves; by slaves who are property, by slaves who are bought and sold, by slaves who are mortgaged, by slaves who are let out like cattle' and challenged Cropper to disprove it or to admit that 'you are slave-trader yourself, for your ships are employed in bringing away the produce of the toil of slaves.'[102] By publicising the supposed horrors of Indian slavery and, more importantly, by linking this slavery directly to sugar production, West Indians sought both to undermine arguments in favour of equalising the sugar duties and to refute the claim that East India sugar was morally purer than West Indian slave-grown produce. 'A notion has been industriously circulated,' Joseph Marryat lamented in a pamphlet published in 1823,

> that in the East Indies, sugar is raised by the labour of free men, and not as in the West Indies by slaves. Some pious persons with tender consciences have been so far duped by these representations, as to renounce the use of West India sugar and adopt that of East India sugar: but it may be proved by the most unquestionable authority, that slaves are employed in the one as well as in the other.[103]

Marryat claimed that Francis Buchanan's account of his journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar 'not only proves the existence of slavery, but that the greater part of the agricultural labour in the provinces through which he passed, and where sugar is an important article of cultivation, is performed by slaves'.[104] Zachary Macaulay's reply, 'A Letter To W. W Whitmore', rebuffed this suggestion, showing that Marryat had chosen his extracts disingenuously to give a false impression of the nature and extent of slavery in Indian sugar-producing regions. While unable to deny Indian slavery entirely, the author maintained that British legal codes meant that there was 'now little or no real slavery in British India' and that Marryat's most shocking examples were drawn from newly acquired areas of India such as Mysore, whence no sugar was imported.[105] Rather than attack the existence of Indian forms of slavery, this pamphlet, like Macaulay's earlier *East and West Indian Sugar*, concentrated on reinforcing the idea that East India sugar was produced by free labour.[106] A similar pattern was followed

five years later, when the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* responded to George Saintsbury's book discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Saintsbury used the 1828 Parliamentary Papers to argue both that sugar was cultivated by slaves all over India and that Indian slavery was far more insidious and degrading than that suffered by Africans in the West Indies.[107] The terms of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*'s response revealed their commitment to maintaining the moral dichotomy between 'free' East Indian sugar and the bloody West Indian variety. Although unable to rebut the existence of Indian slavery entirely, it vociferously denied the majority of Saintsbury's claims, arguing that they were based on a 'wilful and deliberate misrepresentation' of the facts.[108] It dismissed the importance of Indian slavery for their campaign on the grounds that it was not connected to sugar production and was a milder, more benign institution than 'Negro' slavery.[109] Such declarations sat uncomfortably with abolitionist commitment to the principle of 'freedom', however, and the emphasis on the qualitative difference between East and West Indian forms of slavery represented a pragmatic subordination of universal anti-slavery principles to the strategic considerations of the campaign against West Indian slavery. Lamenting their refusal fully to engage with the issue of Indian slavery in the 1820s, one abolitionist, Peter Gordon, writing in 1837, remarked that 'for my own part, I still continue to regret that the Anti-Slavery Society did not face the whole evil of slavery throughout the British dominions, and abolish it at one blow.'[110]

The context in which the question of slavery in India was raised in the 1820s had a fundamental impact on the nature of abolitionist responses to it, which were less concerned with denouncing it on principle than with distancing it from East Indian sugar production. They did this by consigning Indian slavery to an invisible, non-productive domestic space populated by *nautch* girls, prostitutes and long-serving household slaves, drawing a qualitative distinction between this domestic and sexual slavery and agricultural slavery on the plantation model.[111] When they did admit agricultural slavery in India they emphasised its location in recently acquired, non-sugar-producing regions like Mysore and questioned its extent and harshness, representing labour in India as too readily available to support any 'real' system of slavery. Instead they painted a positive picture of the 'free' Indian labourer working happily for his peasant employer, arguing that while 'the cultivation of sugar-cane destroys annually, in the West, thousands of men, women, and children by incessant toil, it will save the lives of thousands in the East, by giving them employment and sustenance.'[112] Moreover, they maintained that what slavery did exist was in decline because

> [in] the East all the authorities are on our side, and are quite as eager to extinguish every trace of slavery as we are. They seem to anticipate every

> suggestion, and to have a uniform, wakeful, and intense desire to prevent or to suppress the evil.—In the West Indies, on the other hand, the authorities are systematically opposed to every effort of the kind; and no means of influence, combination, misrepresentation, and delusion, are left untried for preserving, in their unmitigated harshness, all the most revolting and disgusting features of the system.[113]

Abolitionist faith in EIC benevolence was either misplaced or disingenuous, however, for although, as we have seen, slave-trafficking from Calcutta had been banned in 1789, and from Bombay in 1805, the EIC was far more hesitant to involve itself in Indian agricultural or domestic slavery.[114] Ravi Ahuja argues that 'bonded labour relationships (especially in agriculture) were reproduced and even reinforced before the consolidated colonial regime of the nineteenth century adapted them to British law', and even then, 'Highly coercive as well as immaculately "indigenous" forms of subordinating labour such as *al-amanji*, agrestic slavery or hereditary debt bondage were ingeniously appropriated and modified by the new colonial rulers.'[115] Thus, although EIC action in releasing Indian weavers, salt boilers and others from tied labour and giving them freedom of contract in the 1780s had led to claims that forced labour in India had been entirely abolished,[116] the EIC was loath to intervene in either domestic slavery or existing agricultural relations, and even encouraged coercive forms of indenture and bonded plantation labour.[117]

The tenor of abolitionist discussions of EIC reforms reflect shifts in the wider discourse on empire in the early nineteenth century that increasingly replaced an initial emphasis on the iniquities of EIC rule with an emphasis on the iniquities of Indian society. As Zachary Macaulay put it,

> Let no one then image, that … I am … disposed to screen whatever slavery may be found in India from enquiry and suppression. Unhappily there exist in India many practices which are in the highest degree cruel and barbarous, and in a few districts personal slavery may still prevail … I only wish that the West Indians would join us as cordially in abolishing slavery in the West Indies as we should be forward in uniting with them to abolish not only slavery, but every other inhuman practice still tolerated in the East.[118]

Whereas slavery in the West Indies was a scandal of the British state, slavery in India, along with 'every other inhuman practice still tolerated in the East' was repositioned as a scandal of Indian society that British rule was endeavouring to reform. Yet, while abolitionists such as Wilberforce and Buxton were willing to pressure an unwilling EIC to instigate controversial and potentially dangerous reforms like the suppression of *sati*, they appear to have accepted at face value its assessment of Indian slavery, collaborating in

discursive constructions that distanced it from both British responsibility and East Indian produce. Although the *Anti Slavery Monthly Reporter* maintained in 1828 that 'in whatever degree, and to whatever extent slavery exists in the East Indies, we feel equally anxious to see it extinguished there as in the West Indies',[119] in practice their response to Indian slavery prior to 1833 was conditioned by and subordinated to the imperatives of the campaign against West Indian slavery. Despite their protestations, abolitionists only addressed the issue of Indian slavery when forced to do so by West Indian revelations and made no attempt to turn India into another arena in the battle against slavery until the late 1830s and early 1840s. Significantly, however, despite their discursive attempts to marginalise and mitigate Indian slavery, revelations about its existence were also accompanied by a subtle shift away from economic arguments presenting India as a free-labour substitute for the slave system, to the extent that by the time of the debate on emancipation on 1833, India played no role. As Drescher puts it, 'As a candidate for Britain's free labour alternative, India, like Sierra Leone and Haiti, raised too many issues: how free was its labour and how competitive?'[120]

Notes

1 George Saintsbury, *East India Slavery* (London: C. Tilt, 1829).

2 *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, vol. 3, no. 52 (Sept. 1829), pp. 78–80.

3 See Andrew Ratledge, *Competing for the British Sugar Bowl: East India Sugar, 1792–1865* (Saarbrücken: VDM, 2009) for more on EIC and private investment in the sugar industry.

4 Howard Temperley, 'The Delegalization of Slavery in British India', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 171.

5 One important exception is Marika Sherwood, who mentions both Indian slavery and the treatment of 'free' workers on the cotton plantations in the 1840s, noting that the latter were run by 'rather a rough set of planters, some of whom had been slave-drivers in America and carried unfortunate ideas and practices with them'. Although she questions how much radicals like John Bright knew about conditions in India, she does this only in the context of cotton production and does not mention the relationship between Indian slavery and the sugar debates. Marika Sherwood, *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade since 1807* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 155–7.

6 David Brion Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1823–1833', *Journal of Negro History* 46.3 (1961): 155.

7 Temperley, 'Delegalization', p. 169.

8 Zachary Macaulay, *A Letter to William W. Whitmore … Pointing out Some of the Erroneous Statements Contained in a Pamphlet by Joseph Marryat* (London: L. Relfe, 1823), p. 4.

9 In Thomas Price, *Slavery in America: with Notices of the Present State of Slavery and the Slave Trade Throughout the World* (London: G. Wightman, 1837), p. 79.

10 Thomas Bender, *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). See also Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1986) for a critical discussion of the class origins of the abolitionist movements.
11 Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), pp. 187–8.
12 For the history of sugar as a commodity, see Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).
13 See Charlotte Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792', *Representations* 48 (1994): 48–69.
14 Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 35.
15 Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar', p. 51.
16 Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 40.
17 Cited ibid., p. 35.
18 See Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 177.
19 Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 36.
20 Morton, *The Poetics of Spice*, p. 175.
21 Ibid., p. 173.
22 William Naish and Peckham Ladies' African and Anti-Slavery Association, *Reasons for Using East India Sugar* (London: s.n. 1828).
23 Cited in Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar', p. 57.
24 See ibid.
25 Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 37.
26 Ibid., p. 62.
27 Ibid.
28 Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor vs. Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 115.
29 *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (9 Jan. 1792).
30 The failure of efforts to set up European-run sugar plantations in India using West Indian technology has been blamed on 'climatic and geographic problems', high capital costs and ambivalent EIC attitudes and policy, which provided at best only episodic support for potential sugar barons. For EIC and private British and Anglo-Indian forays into sugar production and the sugar trade, see Ratledge, *Competing for the British Sugar Bowl*. For Indian sugar production, see Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984); Donald W. Attwood, *Raising Cane: The Political Economy of Sugar in Western India* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992).
31 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 17, issue 430 (31 May 1792), p. 51.
32 *The Morning Chronicle* (13 Feb. 1792).
33 Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 39.
34 Naish and Peckham Ladies' African and Anti-Slavery Association, *Reasons for Using East India Sugar*.
35 Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 61.
36 As Jane Webster points out, 'In the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, tea services, rolling pins, sugar bowls, jugs and many other household objects were

produced bearing mottos distancing the user from slave-made produce ("East India sugar not made by slaves"). These objects … were put on show in domestic arenas: kitchens, parlours, dining rooms: presided over by women.' Jane Webster, 'The Unredeemed Object: Displaying Abolitionist Artefacts in 2007', *Slavery & Abolition* 30 (2009): 316.

37 Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement', p. 169.

38 Ibid., p. 162.

39 Anon., *To the Consumers of Sugar. [A Reply to the Arguments Recommending the Purchase of East Indian Sugar, Instead of that from the British West Indian Colonies.]* (London: s.n. 1825), p. 8.

40 In the 1790s, declining British consumption was counterbalanced by the large increase in British West Indian sugar being sold to continental markets, while in Britain the impact of the boycott is obscured by the fact that it occurred at a time of sugar shortage and rising prices. Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 40

41 Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar', p. 51.

42 Seymour Drescher, 'Abolitionist Expectations: Britain', *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 21.2 (2000): 55.

43 In parliament, planters, Caribbean merchants and MPs for ports like Bristol and Liverpool, with close connections to the West Indian trade, made up the West Indian 'interest', while EIC Directors, shareholders and returned employees made up the East India 'interest'. In the abolitionist period the West Indian lobby had between twenty and forty MPs, the East Indians about 100. As Marshall points out, however, this is not necessarily an indication of voting strength as although both were internally fractured the West India lobby was more cohesive, while the East India lobby was far from a unified pressure group. P. J. Marshall, 'The Moral Swing to the East: British Humanitarianism in India and the West Indies', in K. Ballhatchet and J. Harrison (eds), *East India Company Studies: Papers Presented to Professor Sir Cyril Philips* (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1986), pp. 76–7.

44 Public controversy over EIC expansion in India reached its height in the 1780s, with the impeachment of Warren Hastings, although it continued to be contentious in some circles throughout the early nineteenth century. Evangelicals opposed what they considered to be EIC toleration of 'heathen' religions, while radicals like William Cobbett protested against the exploitation of the Indian population. In 1839, the British India Society was formed to protest against EIC misrule in India.

45 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 88.

46 Drescher, 'Abolitionist Expectations: Britain', p. 47.

47 Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, p. 114

48 Ibid., p. 115.

49 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 74.

50 Drescher, 'Abolitionist Expectations: Britain', p. 47.

51 See, for example, Anon., *East India sugar, or, An Inquiry Respecting the Means of Improving the Quality and Reducing the Cost of Sugar Raised by Free Labour in the East Indies* (London: Hatchard, 1824); James Cropper, *Relief for West-Indian Distress, Shewing the Inefficiency of Protecting Duties on East-India Sugar and Pointing out Other Modes of Certain Relief* (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1823).

52 Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, p. 116.

53 Midgley, *Women against Slavery*, p. 60.

54 James Losh, *The Speech of James Losh, Esq., in the Guildhall, Newcastle upon Tyne on the 31st March, 1824 … for the Purpose of Petitioning Parliament for the Improvement and*

Gradual Emancipation of the Slave Population of British Colonies (Newcastle: T. and J. Hodgson, 1824), p. 9.

55 Sherwood, *After Abolition*, p. 152.

56 Anon. (?James Cropper), *Impolicy of Slavery. [A Tract]* (Liverpool: s.n. 1825).

57 Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, p. 116.

58 Ibid.

59 Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement', p. 244.

60 *Liverpool Mercury* (18 May 1821).

61 The idea that free labour was more efficient than slave labour was a longstanding but problematic part of abolitionist discourse. As Seymour Drescher points out, 'Faith in the superior efficacy of free labour (or labour as free as it was in eighteenth-century Britain) did not depend on a reading of Adam Smith. The "fruitlessness of compulsive labour" was proved "every day in every workhouse in the kingdom" ... The problem was always whether this experience could be transferred overseas.' During the campaign against the slave trade, abolitionists refrained from calling for immediate emancipation because they could not be sure that free Africans, degraded as they were by slavery, would be willing to work as free men. For more on abolitionists' ambivalent relationship with the idea of free labour, see Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, p. 18.

62 Ibid., p. 116.

63 *Liverpool Mercury* (18 May 1821).

64 Ibid.

65 Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement', p. 241.

66 Ibid.

67 Cropper himself founded the Liverpool Society for the Amelioration and Gradual Abolition of Slavery and was deeply involved in pressing for the formation of the London Anti-Slavery Society in 1823.

68 Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement', p. 244.

69 Ibid., p. 249.

70 Ibid., p. 254.

71 This was in contrast to the abolitionist campaigns of the 1790s when abolitionists consistently emphasised moral over economic reasons for action. Seymour Drescher, 'Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British Slave Trade', *Parliamentary History* 26 suppl. (2007): 42–65.

72 *Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 14, issue 340 (9 Sept. 1790), p. 1.

73 Losh, *Speech of James Losh in the Guildhall at Newcastle*, p. 9.

74 Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement', p. 256.

75 See Sir John Gladstone and James Cropper, *The Correspondence between John Gladstone, Esq., M.P., and James Cropper, Esq., on the Present State of Slavery in the British West Indies and in the United States of America: And on the Importation of Sugar from the British Settlements in India* (Liverpool: West India Association, 1824).

76 See reply to Cropper in the *Liverpool Mercury* (8 June 1821).

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar', p. 52.

80 David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography* 28.3 (2004): 326.

81 Anon., *To the Consumers of Sugar*, pp. 1–3. In doing so, the author was exploiting the tendency of these observers to use the term 'slavery' metaphorically when referring to various Indian social and religious structures. See Chap. 7, above.
82 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 80.
83 The idea of the 'super-exploitation' of the Indian peasantry via the rapacious tax demands of the Mughal state has informed much subsequent historiography, from W. H. Moreland to Irfan Habib, although more recent scholars now emphasise the dynamism and potentials for growth in the pre-colonial Indian peasant economy.
84 *Liverpool Mercury* (17 Aug. 1821).
85 'The authors of the ruin of these poor creatures', Joseph Marryat declared, 'are now endeavouring to find new employment for them, by starving some hundred thousand slaves in the West Indies.' Joseph Marryat, *A Reply to the Arguments Contained in Various Publications, Recommending an Equalisation of the Duties on East and West Indian Sugar* (London: L. Relfe, 1823), pp. 26–7.
86 William Wilberforce, Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce* (London: J. Murray, 1840), p. 386.
87 *Liverpool Mercury* (17 Aug. 1821).
88 Ibid.
89 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 80.
90 Tennant, *Indian Recreations*, pp. 134–5.
91 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 80.
92 *The Oracle and Public Advertiser* (16 Apr. 1796).
93 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 80.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., p. 81.
96 Drescher, 'Abolitionist Expectations: Britain', p. 45.
97 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 81.
98 *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* (4 Aug. 1821).
99 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 311.
100 'Tyranny of Farmers over Labourers', *Morning Chronicle* (1 July 1829).
101 Cited in Thomas Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1', *American Historical Review* 90.2 (1985): 345.
102 *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* (4 Aug. 1821).
103 Marryat, *A Reply*, p. 32.
104 Ibid., p. 33.
105 Macaulay, *A Letter to William W. Whitmore.*
106 Zachary Macaulay, *East and West India Sugar, or, a Refutation of the Claims of the West India Colonists to a Protecting Duty on East India Sugar* (London: L. Relfe, 1823), pp. 89–95.
107 Saintsbury, *East India Slavery.*
108 *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, vol. 3, no. 52 (Sept. 1829), p. 79.
109 Ibid.
110 Price, *Slavery in America*, p. 79.
111 *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, vol. 2, no. 41 (Oct. 1828).
112 Macaulay, *A Letter to William W. Whitmore*, p. 2.
113 *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, vol. 2, no. 41 (Oct. 1828).
114 See Indrani Chatterjee, 'Abolition by Denial', in Gwyn Campbell (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath in the Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005);

Andrea Major, 'Enslaving Spaces: Domestic Slavery and the Spatial, Ideological and Practical Limits of Colonial Control in the Nineteenth-Century Rajput and Maratha States', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 46.3 (2009): 315–42.

115 Ravi Ahuja, 'Labour Relations in an Early Colonial Context: Madras, *c.*1750–1800', *Modern Asian Studies* 36.4 (2002): 824.

116 Marshall, 'The Moral Swing', p. 82. David Scott, a hard-headed East-India merchant and a Director of the EIC, wrote in a private letter in 1796 that the salt workers in Bengal must be freed from compulsory labour, 'for slaves cannot work so cheap as free men, besides we ought to give all our subjects liberty'. H. R. C. Wright, 'Raffles and the Slave Trade at Batavia in 1812', *Historical Journal* 3.2 (1960): 184–91.

117 See Paul E. Baak, 'About Enslaved Ex-slaves, Uncaptured Contract Coolies and Unfreed Freedmen: Some Notes about "Free" and "Unfree" Labour in the Context of Plantation Development in Southwest India, Early Sixteenth Century–Mid 1990s', *Modern Asian Studies* 33.1 (1999): 121–57.

118 Macaulay, *A Letter to William W. Whitmore*, p. 4.

119 *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, vol. 2, no. 41 (Oct. 1828).

120 Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, p. 118.

Conclusion: 'Do Justice to India': Abolitionists and Indian Slavery, 1839–1843

In June 1840, abolitionists and their sympathisers from across Britain and America met at the first World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. Having finally achieved full emancipation for slaves in the British colonies in August 1838, the anti-slavery movement turned its attention to 'the universal Abolition of Slavery and the Slave trade'.[1] To this end, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which sponsored the conference, had been formed in 1839. It would become one of the most enduring human rights organisations in history, and continues today as the Anti-Slavery Society. Around 400 British and Irish delegates attended the convention, with more than fifty others coming from around the world: from places as diverse as Canada, Mauritius, Haiti, Sierra Leone and especially the United States.[2] Among their number was Professor William Adam, a former British missionary who had spent many years living in India. On the evening of 13 June, he delivered a lecture to the delegates in which he highlighted the continued existence of slavery in the EIC's Indian territories and called for renewed abolitionist efforts to complete the work of emancipation in the British Empire. 'After the labour and sacrifices of the people of Great Britain', he remarked, 'by which it has been supposed by many, that the crime and curse of slavery had been for ever banished from the British dominions; it may well excite astonishment and indignation to learn the fact of the existence of slavery under the British government in India.'[3] Seymour Drescher refers to Adam's speech, and the coverage that Indian slavery subsequently received at the 1840 convention, as the 'first serious survey of slavery in India'.[4] This is not strictly true, of course, although it was the first time that the issue had been taken seriously by abolitionists as an immediate cause for concern and reform.

Adam's speech was an abridged version of a much longer series of open letters on Indian slavery, addressed to the famous parliamentary abolitionist

Thomas Fowell Buxton, which were published while Adam was in Boston, Massachusetts in 1840.[5] In both his speech to BFASS and his published writing, Adam departed from previous abolitionist treatments of Indian slavery, which had marginalised it from the main anti-slavery campaign by playing down its severity and emphasising its indigenous roots. Unlike the abolitionist press of the 1820s, or the Board of Control in 1833, Adam did not believe that East Indian slavery was relatively benign; nor did he accept that the EIC was divested of responsibility for it by virtue of its traditional socio-religious sanction in Indian society. Instead, his account of Indian slavery directly contradicted many of the assumptions, which had previously been used to justify non-interference by colonial authorities and abolitionists alike, by highlighting some of the more troubling aspects of Indian servitude. He admitted, for example, that some famine sales arose 'from the strength of natural affection on the part of the parents to preserve their offspring from starvation', but argued that more often they reflected 'weakness and want of natural affection', and were made 'to satisfy the cupidity of the parent or nominal guardian' at the expense of subjecting the children to 'the degrading occupation of vice and prostitution'. Moreover, he pointed to EIC mismanagement as the cause of the very famines that made such sales necessary in the first place. Kidnapping, he noted, though prohibited by the British government, continued to be rife and was 'caused and cherished' by the EIC's failure to abolish slavery. Similarly, the illegal importation of slaves by land or sea continued clandestinely, while the law did not even attempt to prevent the sale of slaves within their own territories, or the removal of a master with his newly acquired slaves. Although he acknowledged that male domestic slavery was relatively mild, he believed that even the most respectable apologists for East India slavery would admit that 'examples of harsh, severe and even cruel masters are not unknown'. In a rhetorical strategy that mirrored earlier abolitionist focus on the tortured body of the Negro slave, he emphasised instances of physical cruelty, alluding to 'the unnatural and atrocious barbarity' practised on slave eunuchs, and noting a supposed survival rate of just 5 per cent after the 'operation'. Similarly, female domestic slaves, he argued, were not only kept 'almost universally for licentious purposes', but were often subject to 'mutilation and murder'. They were secluded from all communication with others and, having no access to the courts of justice, had no redress for the injustice and cruelty with which they were frequently treated. His description thus contradicted earlier assumptions that Indian slavery was 'divested of all the cruel features which characterised the African trade' and reinserted aspects of natal alienation, physical abuse and moral degradation into abolitionist understandings of it. Children as young as five or seven might, he maintained, be sold by their own mother 'perhaps into vice and infamy' and both female slaves and male

eunuchs might be subject to horrific acts of physical mutilation.[6] The internal trade in slaves separated families and broke up 'all the relations of life'.[7] Reporting on the widespread use of predial slaves in South India, he noted that where Brahmins employed slave labour for the cultivation of their lands 'the treatment of the slave is harsh, his labour severe, his food and clothing scanty, his habitation wretched and his family connection liable to be severed at the will of his master'. Indeed, overall he believed that slavery in British India was as extensive and existed 'in as aggravated a form as it did latterly in the West Indies'.[8]

In addition to emphasising the malevolent aspects of Indian slavery itself, Adam also argued that British rule in India had legitimised, supported and exacerbated the system rather than undermining it. Picking up on the contradiction between the EIC's self-projected image as libertarian reformer and their failure to act decisively to end slavery, Adam asked his audience whether it should be expected that a British government in India, who made 'loud boasts of freedom', should have 'retained in chains those whom they found in chains'? Worse, slavery in India, he maintained, had received the tacit sanction of the British parliament, because it had been 'legalised, and nourished, and supported by the East India Company, a creature of their own forming'. Of course, as we have seen, EIC representatives saw the eradication of slavery from India as a complex, potentially dangerous and in some circumstances undesirable endeavour. Governor-General Lord Auckland had himself implored members of parliament not to eradicate a system that in many cases provided 'mutual advantage', arguing against active legislation on the matter on the basis that EIC policies already effectively undermined slavery. Adam, on the other hand, admitted that various modifications had been made by the EIC to ameliorate slavery, but argued that many of these were practically inoperative, or inaccessible to the slave, while an extensive list of other potential improvements had not been implemented. Ultimately, although he was willing to admit that slavery was not the worst social ill from which India suffered, he maintained that this only proved the benighted state of Indian society, and did not imply that Indian forms of bondage were harmless. 'If slavery in India … is the least of the evils under which that country groans', he remarked, 'you will be better able under this standard to judge of the greater evils under which it suffers'.[9]

The response of the BFASS delegates listening to Adam's speech also diverged from the previous abolitionist responses the issue, accepting the need to incorporate Indian slavery into their campaign. Thus, while previous responses to Indian slavery had emphasised its supposedly mild characteristics in order to counter any damaging revelations about harsh Indian labour conditions, now any such qualitative distinctions were declared invalid. As R. R. R. Moore noted with reference to arguments made in parliament in

1833, 'We do not ground our efforts for the abolition of slavery upon the fact of their being treated cruelly or kindly; we believe that slavery ought not to exist'. Prior to 1833, Zachary Macaulay and others had been ambivalent about the place of Indian slavery within an abolitionist campaign that had yet to achieve its primary aim of West Indian emancipation. In 1840, however, Adam's attempt to put Indian slavery at the centre of the new, expansive and universal conception of global anti-slavery activism chimed with the new focus of the abolitionist movement, epitomised by the convention itself. As Catherine Hall notes, the convention exemplified the basic principles of evangelical liberal humanitarianism: 'All men were the children of Adam, all were entitled to personal, religious and civil liberty. Each man owned his property in his own labour, no man had the right to own property in other men. Such a vision celebrated free labour and the family as the building blocks of a good society.'[10] Slavery, in all its forms, was antithetical to these ideals, and those who did not share this vision were placed in fundamental opposition to the 'civilised subjects' of Great Britain. Moreover, mounting a challenge to Indian slavery, which would have been difficult and divisive in the 1820s, now offered an opportunity to solve several problems at once; not only would it remove the remaining blot on Britain's abolitionist record, but it would clear the way for the development of India as a site for the desired experiment with free-labour production that would both improve the condition of the Indian people and undercut the remaining slave producers in America, Cuba and Brazil.

The terms in which Indian slavery was discussed at the convention in 1840 reflected the widening frame of reference through which the abolitionist movement viewed its campaign, both geographically and in terms of the forms of oppression that were perceived to fall within its remit. As Hall points out, the appointment of the Select Committee on Aboriginal Peoples in 1837 had marked a move away from a focus on slavery itself to 'questions of "what would come after", and how "native peoples" of the empire should be governed'.[11] Similar issues underpinned the formation of the Aborigines Protection Society and the British India Society around this time. In this vein, several of the men who listened to Adam's speech on Indian slavery hoped that the discussion would be extended to include the benighted state of all India's inhabitants. R. N. Colver, for example, urged the committee appointed to consider Adam's report not to confine their thoughts only to slavery proper but also to 'turn their attention to that grinding oppression of the inhabitants of India, which compels them to sell their children in order to preserve them from starvation'. Similarly, Joseph Sams asked the committee to 'turn their attention minutely to the state of British India'. 'Our fellow-subjects, the natives of British India', he declared, 'are exceedingly oppressed'. Slavery in India could not be divorced from the wider conditions of the

country and the economic impositions of the colonial government's revenue-extracting machine; as Joseph Pease noted, 'the land tax is most oppressive, leading to want and starvation, and compelling millions to become slaves for a long series of years.'[12]

BFASS ultimately passed a series of resolutions relating to slavery in India, in which it concluded that as the EIC had failed to act decisively on the issue it was now the duty of 'the British nation to direct their immediate attention to this important subject, and seek the immediate and entire abolition of personal slavery throughout the whole of British India.'[13] Thus, although in 1833 parliamentary abolitionists had been willing to put their faith in their 'friends' in the EIC, believing that they too were eager to see slavery eradicated, after seven years without progress, patience was running out. There followed three years of abolitionist mobilisation, orchestrated by BFASS, aimed at forcing the EIC finally to legislate against slavery in India. A general appeal was made to the country through an 'Address to the Electors', which urged them to make their voices heard in the General Election of 1841 in favour of the 'oppressed children of the East'. Copies of this address were carried in all the leading newspapers. Auxiliary societies were urged to hold public lectures and meetings and placards and pamphlets outlining the condition of slavery in British India were published and disseminated.[14] In one address the BFASS committee reminded the 'Women of England' of 'the continued existence of slavery in British India' and asked them to remember that 'At least 500,000 (some assert there are millions) of British subjects on that vast continent, are held as property, and are in a state of extreme wretchedness; whilst the traffic in human beings is there allowed in practice, if not sanctioned by law.'[15]

Several historians, including Howard Temperley, have explained the emergence of Indian slavery as an issue for abolitionist concern in 1840 as a natural progression of interests after the successful conclusion of the campaigns against slavery and apprenticeship in the Western Hemisphere. It was, however, also closely connected to wider discourses on the nature and future of empire. Debates about the EIC state, and accusations of misrule in India, grew more strident in the late 1830s, especially after the formation of the British India Society in 1839, as those keen to exploit India's economic potential as both a supplier and a market for British goods sought to draw public attention to aspects of Indian society and government that might impede this. Under these circumstances, the condition of the people of India became increasingly significant for a range of debates that sought to reposition the subcontinent within newly emerging relationships of trade and labour in a post-emancipation empire. The free-produce movement, for example, continued the ethos of abstentionism and applied it to a wider range of products, looking to India as a potential supplier of a range of goods,

including cotton, while free labour was increasingly being emphasised as the only legitimate capitalist mode of production.[16]

The nature and future of the imperial labour force was a key contemporary concern, in which Indians played an increasingly important role. In particular, focus was directed towards the use of Indian indentured workers in former slave colonies, as hard-pressed plantation owners looked to fill the labour gap left by the end of apprenticeship with 'coolies' from the subcontinent. This new supply of labour was looked on sceptically by some abolitionists, who, though not opposed to voluntary labour migration itself, were moved by reports of dubious recruitment practices, high mortality rates and shocking existential conditions to label the so-called 'coolie trade' as 'merely another form of the same traffic' as the slave trade. The BFASS convention in June 1840 coincided exactly with the parliamentary debates over the repeal of the 1838 ban on Indian indentured migration to Mauritius, and both BFASS and BIS were deeply concerned with the potential outcome of such a measure. BIS presented two petitions to parliament relative to the deportation of Hill Coolies—one denouncing the late attempt to revive that measure, the other asking for a select committee of the House of Commons in order that it 'may be established by evidence that the deportation of the natives of India is contrary to humanity, justice and sound policy."[17] As Madhavi Kale points out, BFASS and its supporters were far from unanimous in their responses to the problem of labour in a post-emancipation empire, or indeed in their attitudes to empire itself. Yet most agreed that while 'free' labour migration around the sites of empire was something that could be encouraged, there were specific problems involved when these migrants were Asians or Africans, for it was believed that these uneducated and often impoverished peasants—these 'ignorant and helpless beings'—were uniquely susceptible to unscrupulous recruiters and exploitative contracts, and could not be expected to give informed consent. Coupled with this was the fear that the importation of large numbers of cheap, contracted labourers would depress wages and retard the establishment of 'a genuinely free market in labour'.[18] Of course, as Kale points out, such arguments represented both a gendered and a race-inflected conception of free labour, denying Indian labourers the capacity to act as free agents, even as they sought to 'protect' them from exploitation, and opening a debate about which of the empire's subjects were fit to engage autonomously in the free-labour market.[19]

Under these circumstances, the newly articulated desire to eradicate slavery in India did not simply reflect a desire to wipe away a blot on Britain's abolitionist record but also hinted at the strategic importance of India within wider debates on trade and empire. Indeed, in many ways discussions about Indian slavery were not about conditions on the subcontinent at all but

were deployed as a potential weapon against surviving forms of slavery in the Western Hemisphere. India continued to be championed by some abolitionists as a potential supplier of free-labour alternatives to slave produce in the 1840s. Just as East Indian sugar had been touted as the alternative that would undercut the West Indies' slave economy in the 1820s, so other Indian productions, such as cotton, were increasingly being suggested as weapons against the continued use of slaves in the American South. The idea of free labour alternatives was specifically taken up by the 1840 convention BFASS, with the example of the success of Indian indigo production put forward as an indicator of India's potential for commodity production—a somewhat problematic example given the unpopularity of indigo production among the Indian peasantry and the harshness of the measures to which indigo planters and colonial state had to resort to ensure a labour supply for this crop. In order to facilitate the use of free-labour produce, the committee of BFASS was requested to institute a careful inquiry into the produce of slave labour and to circulate a complete list of those commodities that were produced by slave labour, with a statement of articles that could be obtained by free labour. Meanwhile Trinidad, British Guiana and British India were identified as crucial sites of future free-labour production, especially of sugar.[20]

The renewed emphasis on India as a source of 'free-labour' produce meant that the issue of slavery in India remained problematic for abolitionists in 1840, for wholeheartedly to publicise its existence on the subcontinent would undermine previous assertions about Indian free labour. As Revd J. H. Johnson put it,

> in order to promote the abolition of slavery, I have been in the habit of inducing persons to abstain from the use of all articles which are produced by the labour of slaves … I took no sugar at all myself; but to those of my friends who took it, I recommended the practice of taking only sugar which came from the East Indies, because I thought that the East India sugar was the produce of the labour of freemen. Now, if it should go forth to the world, that the larger portion of the labourers in the East Indies are under slavery, would not I, and those who acted as I did, appear as traducers? Was the sugar which was said to be the produce of free labour, really so? or was it the product of slave-labour?[21]

He was assured by several of the men present, including George Thompson, Captain Stuart and William Adam himself, that 'If the sugar really came from Bengal, it was not the produce of forced labour … prædial and agrestic slavery [existing primarily] in the southern part' and not being related to sugar production.[22] This spatial division between slave-holding areas and sugar-producing ones was the same as that constructed by Macaulay a decade earlier. Yet while the abolitionists of the 1820s had been content to

prove that Indian slavery and Indian sugar were not connected, by 1840 they wished to see not only Indian slavery but also various other forms of Indian colonial oppression redressed.

Part of the impetus for renewed focus on East Indian slavery came from the Americas, where slavery continued on the southern plantations and sections of the anti-slavery movement were becoming more radical and more vocal. Like other early nineteenth-century religious and social reform movements the anti-slavery societies operated on a transatlantic basis, with a regular exchange of ideas and personnel between Britain and the United States. The process was facilitated by the shared ideology and common background of many abolitionists on both sides of the ocean, although by 1840 there were also growing tensions between the more militant wing of the American abolitionist movement and some British evangelicals and Quakers, who had become alarmed at reports that sections of the American movement were both fanatical and irreligious. That William Adam's volume on slavery in India was published in Boston is significant, as it was the home of the vocal anti-slavery activist William Lloyd Garrison, who took an active interest in British anti-slavery and developments relating to British colonial policy in India.[23] Indeed, as Elizabeth Kelly Gray discusses, conditions in India became increasingly relevant within debates on slavery in America after 1833. Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*, carried numerous articles about British India in the early 1840s that were ferociously critical of EIC misrule there.[24]

The continued existence of slavery in India posed a problem for those engaged in campaigning against that institution in the American South, because it undermined Britain's claims to have dealt effectively with the problem and tinged British abolitionists' remonstrations against slave-holding nations with hypocrisy. Adam himself recognised the difficulty that publicising the existence of slavery in India would cause. In the introduction to his published letters on the subject, he noted:

> It may perhaps be deemed that here the agitation of the subject of slavery in India is inappropriate, and that it will do no good, and may do some harm. I certainly feel that what I have to say will establish a charge of inconsistency against England, tending to lessen the force of her example in the West Indies, and to furnish a temporary triumph to the friends of slavery in this country.

This triumph, however, he believed, would be fleeting, as once the issue had been raised, agitation could not fail to result in removal of the evil, leading to a more profound victory for the abolitionists—'the cause of truth, justice and humanity, cannot be promoted by the concealment of facts'.[25] Adam's

concerns were well founded, for, as Gray points out, supporters of American slavery often used conditions in India to suggest that Britons lacked the moral authority to criticise their peculiar institution, as well as to normalise American practices. Significantly, however, they rarely referred directly to the existence of slavery in India, but rather spoke metaphorically about the oppression of colonial subjects as being akin to enslavement. In the 1853 edition of *The Planter; or, Thirteen Years in the South*, for example, David Brown implored the 'Ladies of England' to 'make the wretched condition of your own Indian slaves, as comfortable as are our Southern Negroes.' Similarly, South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun questioned British condemnation of slavery, a situation in which 'a body of men' held another group 'in subjection', when they were willing to accept imperial domination, in which 'one nation' holds 'another in subjection'. The East India Company, from Calhoun's perspective, was at least as culpable as American slave-owners because 'the whole of Hindostan' was 'one magnificent plantation, peopled by more than one million slaves', and the Company's power over them was 'far more unlimited and despotic than that of any southern planter over his slaves.'[26] Under these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that Adam should predict that his admission of the true state of slavery in India might be used against the abolitionist cause, as it had been by West Indian planters in the 1820s. Yet, as Gray points out, actual Indian slavery was far less useful to the pro-slavery lobby than the metaphorical linking of slavery and colonial oppression, for indigenous Indian slavery pre-dated the East India Company, and did not supply clear evidence of a British double standard. Moreover, few American slave-holders would have liked to see their own institution likened to 'heathen' or Islamic practices, or gained any solace from the idea that Hindus and Muslims were also slave-holders.[27]

Although published in America, Adam's introduction made it clear that he was writing to a British audience. Not only were his letters addressed to British parliamentary abolitionist Thomas Fowell Buxton, but he explicitly stated that his primary design was to co-operate with the recently established BIS, the purpose of which was to 'collect and communicate information respecting India, to excite an interest in the welfare of its people, and to promote measures for their protection and improvement'. Slavery in India, he said, was unlikely to receive the attention of this new Society, or of other benevolent organisations, unless it was drawn directly to their attention through measures such as his. Even in India, he lamented, it had received so little discussion that he had known its very existence to be denied by generally well-informed persons. Adam, who was on the provisional committee of the fledgling society, thus drew the attention of both abolitionists and advocates for India to the issue of slavery on the subcontinent

and ensured that the BIS would have to include the issue in its programme for the amelioration of India.[28]

The BIS formally came into being at a public meeting in Freemasons' Hall, London, on Saturday, 6 July 1839, although key figures in its formation, such as old India hand Major General Briggs and abolitionist George Thompson, had been touring the country for some months previously, giving speeches in meeting houses advocating the need for and garnering support for the organisation. The event at Freemasons' Hall was attended by 'a great number of highly respectable ladies' and included several Indians upon the platform, although they were not recorded as having offered speeches themselves. Lord Henry Brougham, the well-known parliamentary abolitionist, opened the meeting by emphasising that if Britain was to rule India it was her duty to do so well and for the benefit of the Indians themselves. The British India Society is often referred to as an anti-slavery society, and it is true that many abolitionists supported its formation, including Thomas Clarkson and especially Joseph Pease and the aforementioned George Thompson.[29] The Society's primary concerns did not initially dwell on the existence of slavery in India, however, but rather were focused on the more general 'oppression and sufferings of their fellow-subjects in the East'.[30] Spurred on by a series of terrible famines in the early nineteenth century, and convinced of the suffering of the Indian people under EIC rule, its mission was partly humanitarian, although there is also a clear political and economic agenda. Key figures within the BIS, such as Thompson and Pease, were motivated by the strong conviction that a rejuvenated India could become both the major supplier of raw materials and a key market for British manufactures in the post-emancipation world. Indeed, so passionately did Pease believe this that American abolitionist John A. Collins saw him as 'literally a man of one idea', adding, 'British India is his hobby. It is with him the universal panacea for all the ills the flesh is heir to.'[31] Yet, although the focus of the BIS was nominally India, its scope was actually much wider. By emphasising the fact that India could be developed to challenge the remaining slave states as producers of imperial staples, and thus undercut slavery in the American South and elsewhere, its goals were global; its ethos linked improvements in one part of the empire to beneficial developments in others. As Thompson put it,

> Do justice to India and banish the demon of intestine warfare from Africa! Do justice to India and drive the miscreant man-thief from the banks of the Niger and Gambia! Do justice to India and see the fetter fall from the limbs of the slave! Do justice to India and see your wharves covered, your warehouses filled and your looms made busy, and your populations clothed by the produce of the East, with the fruits of the industry of the conquered

> and countless millions, who cry from the banks of the Ganges, and the Brahmapootra and the Indus—If you would redeem Africa, you must regenerate India![32]

At meetings around the country, members of the BIS laid out the terrible state of the Indian population for their audiences. Harrowing details of the effects of famine were used to emphasise the need for humanitarian action and improved government in British India. Thompson repeatedly listed various famines under EIC rule (in 1764–6, 1770–1, 1782–3, 1792–3, 1803–4, 1820–1, 1823–4, 1832–3, 1833–4, 1835–6 and 1837–8), reminding his audiences that while they were struggling for the emancipation of Negro slaves 'almost as many human beings as there were apprentices in the British colonies, died of hunger'. These British subjects, Thompson maintained, died in 'the garden and granary of the world', in a land 'where a man may be sustained for thirty days on two shillings'. Describing the plight of the 500,000 men, women and children who perished in the neighbourhood of Agra, Thompson's rhetoric mirrored that of the abolitionist and missionary press when describing the horrors of slavery and 'heathenism' respectively:

> Mothers deserted and destroyed their children, leaving them on the highways, or throwing them at night into the Jumna. The vulture and the jackal fastened onto the fainting prostrate wretch before his life was gone; the courses of small rivers were impeded by the masses of bodies thrown into their channels by those employed to clear the highways; and European residents were compelled to abandon their evening drive, from the impossibility of encountering the effluvia, arising from the putrid corpses around.[33]

Similarly, Daniel O'Connell gave a rabble-rousing speech in which he narrated a vivid account of the ongoing famine in India, asking, 'If there was a love stronger than another in this world, was it not the love of a mother for her offspring? To what miserable state must a mother be reduced before she in the night took her dear child and deprived it of life, so that she might not have the torture of seeing it die of starvation in the morning?'[34]

For Thompson and other members of the BIS, these famines were 'not traceable to war, or … the divine hand' but to misrule. The state of the roads and the failure to provide proper infrastructure, the excessive land tax, the salt and opium monopolies, the inland and sea duties, as well as the haughty, arrogant and insolent way in which most Britons in India treated the natives, were the chief sources of the oppression and misery of the people and were a cause of loss, inconvenience, vexation and loud and just complaint. All things in India, Thompson maintained, were in a declining state as a result of EIC misrule—public works, manufactures, credit, wages, inland customs, revenue from the land and, worst of all, the loyalty of the people. In his

many speeches he catalogued the various ways in which traditional institutions had been eroded and replaced by British ones that were not suited to the country, warning that 'By depriving the communities of their rights, we have engendered crime, misery and revolt, and every fresh inroad on the municipalities loosens our hold on the affections of the people and hastens the downfall of our empire.'[35]

The aims of the BIS were not solely humanitarian, of course: they linked sympathy with suffering of colonial subjects overseas with political and economic concerns about the future of India as a colony. Like sections of the abolitionist movement in the 1820s, and BFASS in 1840, they drew on economic arguments and on the vision of India both as a key commodity producer and as a potential site for private enterprise, once the monopolies of the EIC had been stripped back.[36] India, Thompson argued, was Britain's 'own fair, bountiful vineyard', but had 'been forgotten by some, despised by others and mismanaged by all.' If India were to be regenerated and better managed, however, it could be made into a bountiful supplier of 'cotton-wool, coffee, sugar, rice, gums, indigo, spices, ebony and other woods, oils, cinnamon, musk, muslins, bandannas, ginger, senna, cochineal, tea, linseed, pimento, aloes, cocculus, indicus, steel, gold, pearls and diamonds.'[37] Not only this, but it also had the potential to be a major market. Brougham followed James Cropper's argument by saying that if Indians were better off they would be able to purchase more British goods, while Thompson argued that increased prosperity for Indians would help raise the condition of the working classes in Britain. Challenging those inclined to accuse him of carrying 'philanthropy to a too distant market', he maintained,

> I cannot more effectually seek you comfort and independence than by promoting the welfare of the natives of India. Justice for the natives of India means employment for the artisans of England. Rescue from poverty and nakedness the Hindoo and Mohamedan on the plains of India—put it in the power of the natives of India to cover his head with a turban and his shoulders with a scarf, and you instantly create a demand for the manufactures of your own country, which will put in requisition all the energy and skill of your labouring population.[38]

Underpinning the humanitarian rhetoric of improving the condition of the Indian population, then, were the same economic arguments made by Cropper in the 1820s, positioning India as the free-labour alternative to the slave system. Indeed, at a BIS meeting in Liverpool, Frankland specifically referred to James Cropper as 'one of the warmest friends of the cause', noting that Cropper had

> strongly contended for the necessity of efforts to better the condition of the natives of India, and to enable them to supply England with the produce of that country; and if only they exerted themselves to procure the articles they required, whether luxury or necessity, from the produce of free instead of slave labour, the object would be attained.[39]

Likewise, Wendell Phillips of Boston spoke in detail about how free-grown cotton from India could undercut American slavery and help bring about its demise, noting that this was not a new project, but had the advocacy of Cropper and Clarkson.[40] Those who bought tobacco, cotton or rice from slave sources, Thompson declared, upheld and rewarded slavery and were 'at this moment the reluctant tributaries and impatient vassals of the slave-holder, dragged at the wheels of the monster's car—a monster they have themselves fed, harnessed and employed.' Instead, he called upon the 'patrons of peaceful, bloodless and anti-slavery commerce' to turn their attention to 'the home of the cotton tree, the birthplace of sugar cane'—India, 'whose fertile soil and willing sons, wait to give you, in more than abundance, the luscious juices, and nutritious grains, and fragrant berries, which, for now two centuries or more, have been reared among the thunders of a violated law, and stained with the blood of the helpless innocent.' Thompson thus specifically linked the improvement of East India trade to both the uplift of the Indians and the end of slavery in the Americas:

> When we do justice to India. When we prefer the sugar of Bengal, and the rice of Patna and the cotton of Bombay, to the produce of the despot-cursed regions of Carolina, and Louisiana and the Texas! Then my Lord will we have Cotton without Slavery. Sugar without Slavery. We have eighty millions of free fellow subjects in India. With these we may successfully fight all the Slave holders, Slave breeders and Slave stealers in Christendom. Let the merchants and manufacturers of Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester and London, help us to get justice for India and … the produce of free labour shall drive out of the market the blood sprinkled produce of the captive African.[41]

One of the key arguments put forward by Thompson and other BIS members was that improved conditions in India would contribute to the salvation of the 300,000–400,000 men, women and children still sacrificed annually on the 'reeking shrine of the insatiate Moloch of Modern Slavery'.[42] The slavery with which they were principally concerned, however, was still that of Africans in the Americas rather than the enslaved or bonded labourers of India. Thus, although they acknowledged the existence of slavery in India, and the need for its redress, it was not their principle concern; indeed, early speeches by Thompson and Briggs in support of the new

Society, such as that given at public meetings in Darlington on Thursday, 14 February 1839, made no mention of Indian slavery at all.[43] The BIS's aim on its inauguration was abolitionist, but it was the end of American rather than Indian slavery that was its primary goal. Supporters were encouraged to 'do justice to the natives and the soil of India' in order to 'snap the fetters of the slave in the West and starve the miscreant prowler from the shores of Africa'.[44] By 1840, however, with the publication of Adam's letters and the BFASS convention, BIS members increasingly began to include the issue of slavery in India in their debates; Thompson admitted that 'The subject of slavery in India claims the earnest attention of the abolitionists of this Kingdom. Our principles, our pledges and our petitions would rise up in judgement against us, were we to neglect this matter.'[45] Thus, although one member's observation that India's greatest blessing was 'with partial exceptions, the absence of that degrading system of Slavery which prevailed in other parts of the world' drew loud cheers from the gathered crowd, the existence of even partial slavery sat uncomfortably with their constructions of India as a site of free labour, and Britain as the liberator of the enslaved.

Delegates from America spelled what failure to address Indian slavery directly would mean for the wider abolitionist project. William Lloyd Garrison spoke at the meeting, saying he was happy to support the amelioration of the natives of India, both as an end in itself and because this would help to overturn slavery in America. He asked his audience, however, to remember 'that there were not less than one million slaves in India, who were held under the power of the British nation'. In an impassioned speech, he asked why it was that the people of England were not moved by a fact like that, why all their sympathy was exhibited towards the West India slaves, while no regard had been paid to the condition of the slaves in the East Indies?[46] Similarly, H. B. Stanton of New York reminded the British members of the BIS of the inconsistency of Great Britain permitting slavery in India, arguing that this allowed Britain's motives for abolishing slavery in West Indies to be impugned, and warning that 'so long as Great Britain held slaves in India, she blotted out the brilliancy that surrounded her example in the West Indies'. Likewise, Wendell Phillips urged them to

> take care that in carrying out this plan, the protection thrown over India, did not bring forth into life weeds as well as flowers—take care that slavery did not gather strength with the rest of the institutions, which would be strengthened in India, and that it did not, as it had done in America, monopolise the resources of another world in the East. That was the only danger that could be anticipated in the progress of the society … take care that in driving cotton from our shores, you do not admit a single pound that is equally bloodstained with our own.[47]

Not all members of the BIS were keen to take up the issue of Indian slavery directly. Some sought to distance it from the labour that produced the products they sought to import. Henry Blanchard, for example, cited Thomas Baber as describing them as slaves to the remotest posterity, adding, as Macaulay had done, that the system of slavery that exists in India could not altogether to be attributed either to this country or to the East India Company, as it existed in those parts which had come most recently into our possession. O'Connell suggested that the question of slavery in India was best left to BFASS, as their particular province, and emphatically declared it their duty to take the issue up. He did note, however, that the evils of slavery could not be exaggerated and that slavery-hating Britons would not have got full value for money for their twenty million pounds, paid for the extinction of slavery, until those enslaved in the East were liberated. The EIC, he maintained, should be held to account for its failure to act and not be allowed 'to pass Scot free', for, despite their commitments at the time of the Emancipation and Charter debates, 'they had done just nothing, and if they could have done less, they would have done it'.[48]

For O'Connell, Thompson and others, the issue of Indian slavery was not just about abolitionism but about the rule of the EIC in India and its implications for India's future within a reconfigured imperial system. In his published letter to Thomas Fowell Buxton, Adam noted that one of the reasons for raising the issue of Indian slavery was that given the extent of the EIC's dominions in India 'the civilised world is entitled to know for what purposes of good or evil such unexampled power is exercised'.[49] While admitting that he did not have sufficient information on slavery in India to make a definitive statement, Thompson noted that the people of England were specially bound to inquire and judge how the 'grave trust' of sovereignty of India vested in the EIC by the 1833 Charter Act was being fulfilled, and whether the EIC was discharging its duty or not. Debates over slavery in India, then, were about much more than the existential conditions of a million or so Indian bondsmen and women.

The BIS was short lived and was defunct by 1843, the very year in which the EIC government in India 'delegalised' slavery in their subcontinental possessions. Historians such as David Turley have written it off as 'a mixture of unconventional religion and radical politics' whose brief existence indicated the further fragmentation of the British anti-slavery movement.[50] I have chosen to end this exploration of the discursive formations surrounding the issue of slavery in India with this short-lived and relatively obscure organisation because its treatment of Indian slavery was in so many ways representative of how the issue was incorporated into wider debates and discourses about the reconfiguration of global networks of trade, philanthropy and labour in the early nineteenth century. For although abolitionists

and BIS members were addressing the existence of slavery in India directly in 1840, their concern was less with changing the conditions of labour there than with re-establishing the credentials of Indian labour as fundamentally free, in order to promote their vision of its place in a prosperous post-emancipation empire. As John Dunlop put it at one BIS meeting, 'if they should consecrate the soil of India to free labour, and put down oppression there, they would find that justice was power, and would lead to the health, happiness and prosperity of the Empire'. Likewise, Colonel Thompson rejoiced that the formation of the BIS suggested that 'England has begun to awake to her responsibilities as the arbiter of the welfare and happiness of the millions of India; and to perceive the vast importance of our Empire in that part of the globe, as a means of effectually putting an end to the horrible evils of Slavery, by supplying us with an unlimited amount of free labour.'[51] The BIS then, though couching its purpose in humanitarian language, was a political organisation that sought to mobilise networks of colonial philanthropy both to better the conditions of Britain's Indian subjects and to reposition India within the political, economic and ideological networks that constituted the empire.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the British India Society took place in the same year that the East India Company authorities in India finally bowed to metropolitan pressure and 'delegalised' slavery in India. Act V of 1843 contained four main clauses: public officers were forbidden to sell persons in execution of judicial decrees; courts were forbidden to recognise slavery; so-called slaves were not to be deprived of their property; and acts that would be an offence if done to a freeman would be equally so if done to a slave. As such, the act itself did not actively emancipate any slaves, or significantly alter the conditions of the millions of labourers and domestics who had formerly borne that name. As late as 1852, C. H. Cameron, one of the former Law Commissioners, could comment that there was still 'a great mass of slavery existing de facto', and slave-holding in India would not be criminalised until 1860. Yet it was enough to appease BFASS, which sent a congratulatory address to the Queen and which, apart from the occasional attempt to remind the EIC of its duty to inform slaves of their right to freedom, or to encourage Indian princely rulers to abolish slavery in their territories, saw no further need to intervene. Meanwhile, in 1843–4, the 'coolie trade' was reopened, first to Mauritius and then to the West Indies, marking an upsurge in what would become increasingly substantial labour migration from South Asia and opening a new chapter in terms of India's connection to the wider capitalist networks of

free labour and so-called free trade in the mid nineteenth century. Concerns about slavery in India were thus replaced in metropolitan circles by debates about a new form of labour management, and the extent to which it could be conceptualised as free or coerced. Meanwhile, in India, as Indrani Chatterjee points out, the EIC continued in many cases to uphold proprietors' rights, enforce labour discipline and collaborate with slavery under other names.

The debate over respective labour conditions in the East and West Indies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries demonstrates how complex and contested the relationships between humanitarian, political and economic imperatives were. Although traditional British imperialist historiography has tended to accept the humanitarianism of the so-called 'civilising mission' as an integral aspect of imperialism, its sincerity has been vigorously attacked by anti-colonialist and revisionist historians, for whom it was at best 'a limited piece of window dressing'.[52] Yet to dismiss the civilising mission as nothing but a facade to screen exploitative economic interests is as simplistic as to accept its benevolence uncritically. Rather, humanitarian agendas must be understood as functioning within a complex matrix of moral, economic, political and pragmatic imperatives that produced fissured and contested ideological formations that were applied unevenly across the sites of empire. In the case of anti-slavery ideology, it has been assumed that 'For abolitionists the difference between slavery and other forms of "unfree" labour, however exploitative the latter may now seem to have been, was absolute and could never be bridged.'[53] Yet the economic and practical issues raised by the existence of slavery in an arena that had previously been imagined as a site of free labour forced a renegotiation of ideas that posited an absolute and universal dichotomy between slavery and freedom, leading to a revised and differentiated construction of how slavery might function in different contexts and locations. The ambivalent nature of abolitionist treatments of Indian slavery suggest that pragmatic and economic considerations shaped their ideas as much as moral ones, and their opposition to slavery in all its forms was not absolute but contingent on both the wider imperatives of their campaign and the assumption about the differential functioning of 'other slaveries' in other contexts and other locations in the empire. Debates over Indian labour conditions and Indian slavery, though limited, are vital for our understanding of the ideological and practical priorities of the abolitionist movement, the conflicted role that humanitarianism played within the imperial project and the shifting focus of empire in the early nineteenth century.

Notes

1 British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention* (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1841), p. v.

2 Catherine Hall, 'The Lords of Humankind Re-Visited', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66.3 (2003): 475.

3 William Adam, *Slavery in India: Paper Presented to the General Anti-Slavery Convention* (London: J. Haddon, 1840).

4 Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 268.

5 William Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India; in a Series of Letters to T. F. Buxton, Esq.* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1840).

6 Ibid., p. 81.

7 Ibid., p. 84.

8 British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Proceedings*, pp. 78–9.

9 Ibid.

10 Hall, 'The Lords of Humankind Re-Visited', p. 474.

11 Ibid.

12 British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Proceedings*, p. 87.

13 British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention* (London: Johnston and Barrett, 1840).

14 Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833–1870* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 104. The main BFASS publication on this was John Scoble's *Slavery and the Slave Trade in British India* (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1840–1) although at seventy-two pages this was too long for general distribution and was republished in pamphlet form as *A Brief View of Slavery in India*. These pamphlets joined those by Adam and by Peggs, whose *Slavery in India*, taken from the 1830 volume *India Cries to British Humanity*, was republished in 1839.

15 Address from the committee of BFASS to 'the Women of England' (1840).

16 See, for example, Louis Billington, 'British Humanitarians and American Cotton, 1840–1860', *Journal of American Studies* 11.3 (1977): 313–34; Thomas P. Martin, 'Cotton and Wheat in Anglo-American Trade and Politics, 1846–1852', *Journal of Southern History* 1.3 (1935): 293–319; C. Duncan Rice, 'The Anti-Slavery Mission of George Thompson to the United States, 1834–1835', *Journal of American Studies* 2.1 (1968): 13–31; C. Duncan Rice, 'Humanity Sold for Sugar! The British Abolitionist Response to Free Trade in Slave-Grown Sugar', *Historical Journal* 13.3 (1970): 402–18.

17 *Report of the British India Society Read at the First Annual Meeting ... July, 6th 1840* (London: British India Society, 1840), p. 8.

18 Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 110.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 114.

21 British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Proceedings*, pp. 87–8.

22 Ibid., p. 88.

23 The American abolitionist movement had divided into two warring factions by 1840 and most American Quakers refused to associate with the Garrisonian wing. This conflict was exported to Britain where an already declining anti-slavery movement became increasingly divided in its attitude towards American abolitionism.

24 Elizabeth Kelly Gray, 'Whisper to Him the Word "India": Trans-Atlantic Critics and American Slavery, 1830–1860', *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2008): 379–406.
25 Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India*, p. 9.
26 Cited in Gray, 'Whisper to Him the Word "India"', pp. 385, 389.
27 Ibid., p. 388.
28 Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India*, pp. 5–6.
29 Founder members of BIS included: W. Adam, W. Aldam, J. Blackhouse, W. Thomas Blair, Major-General Briggs, Lord Brougham, F. C. Brown, Thomas Christy, Thomas Clarkson, John Crawfurd, Sir Charles Forbes, Vesey Leslie Foster, Thomas Frankland, John Harford, William Howitt, John Hull, J. Pease, Sir Culling E. Smith and George Thompson.
30 British India Society, *British India: The Duty and Interest of Great Britain, to Consider the Condition and Claims of her Possessions in the East: Addresses Delivered before the Members of the Society of Friends, at their Yearly Meeting, Devonshire House, Bishopsgate Street, on the 1st of June, 1839* (London: Johnston and Barrett, 1839), p. 1.
31 Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 102.
32 British India Society, *British India ... 1st of June, 1839*, pp. 14–15.
33 Ibid.
34 British India Society, *Speeches, Delivered at a Public Meeting, for the Formation of a British India Society: Held in the Freemasons' Hall, Saturday, July 6th, 1839* (London: British India Society, 1839), p. 30.
35 British India Society, *British India ... 1st of June, 1839*, p. 21.
36 The EIC had had the last of its commercial functions removed during the Charter renewal of 1833.
37 British India Society, *British India ... 1st of June, 1839*, p. 11.
38 British India Society, *Speeches, Delivered at a Public Meeting ... July 6th, 1839*, p. 30.
39 British India Society, *British India ... 1st of June, 1839*, p. 2.
40 *Report of the British India Society ... July, 6th 1840*, p. 27.
41 British India Society, *British India ... 1st of June, 1839*, p. 6.
42 Ibid., p. 5.
43 British India Society, *British India: Proceedings of a Public Meeting in Darlington, Held at the Friends' Meeting House on Thursday Evening February 14th 1839* (Darlington: J. Wilson, 1839).
44 British India Society, *British India ... 1st of June, 1839*, p. 43.
45 Ibid., p. 38.
46 *Report of the British India Society ... July, 6th 1840*, p. 14.
47 Ibid., p. 18.
48 Ironically, in support of his attack on Indian slavery, O'Connell, apparently unaware of its provenance, read a passage from George Saintsbury's 'East India Slavery' (which he erroneously declared had been published in India). Ibid., p. 30
49 Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India*, p. 8.
50 David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780–1860* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 98.
51 British India Society, *Speeches, Delivered at a Public Meeting ... July 6th, 1839*, p. 22.
52 P. J. Marshall, 'The Moral Swing to the East: British Humanitarianism in India and the West Indies', in K. Ballhatchet and J. Harrison (eds), *East India Company Studies: Papers Presented to Professor Sir Cyril Philips* (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1986), p. 69.
53 Ibid., p. 79.

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